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A PARISIAN ROMANCE.

(UN ROMAN PARISIEN.)

THE BOOK THE POPULAR PLAY OF "A PARISIAN ROMANCE"
WAS TAKEN FROM, WHICH PLAY IS PRONOUNCED
TO BE THE GREATEST PRODUCTION EVER
WITNESSED ON THE AMERICAN STAGE.

BY OCTAVE FEUILLET.

AUTHOR OF "THE GOUNT DE CAMORS," "BELLAH," "THE LITTLE COUNTESS,"
"THE AMOURS OF PHILIPPE; OR, PHILIPPE'S LOVE AFFAIRS."

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CHAPTER I.

JEANNE'S CONQUEST.

IT would be too much to assert that all marriageable young girls are angels, but there are some angels among marriageable young girls. Indeed, they are by no means rare, and strange as it may appear, they are much less rare in Paris than elsewhere. The reason is very simple. In this great Parisian conservatory, virtues and vices,

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as well as talents, are developed with the greatest possible rapidity, and attain the highest degree of perfection or of subtilty. Nowhere in the world does one breathe more acrid poisons or sweeter perfumes. Nowhere, too, is a pretty woman more attractive, or a good woman more thoroughly good.

Every one knew that the Marquise de Latour-Mesnil, though one of the best and prettiest of her sex, had not been particularly happy with her husband. Not that he was really a bad man, but he liked to enjoy himself, and he did *not* enjoy himself in the society of his wife. Consequently, he had greatly neglected her: she had wept bitterly in secret without his either knowing or caring; then he died, leaving the Marquise with the impression that her life had been a failure. As she was a gentle, modest soul, she had the goodness to blame herself on the score of insufficient merit, and wishing to save her daughter from a similar destiny, she applied all

her energies to the task of making her an eminently accomplished and elegant person, who would, perhaps, also be capable of retaining her husband's affection after marriage. These superior educations are in Paris, as elsewhere, the consolation of many widows whose husbands are still alive.

Mademoiselle Jeanne Bérengère de Latour-Mesnil had the good fortune to be endowed by Heaven with all the attributes likely to aid in the realization of the ambition her mother entertained for her. Her naturally intelligent and active mind adapted itself marvellously to the delicate maternal culture that her parent had bestowed upon it in her daughter's earliest infancy. Later, superior instructors, carefully watched and superintended, initiated her into all the ideas, tastes and accomplishments that form a woman's greatest adornment. In moral training, her only teacher was her mother, who, by her example and by the inherent purity of

her character, made her daughter as healthy in mind as herself.

In addition to the merits we have just mentioned, Mademoiselle de Latour-Mesnil had the good luck to possess another, which it is impossible for frail human nature to underrate: she was extremely pretty, and possessed the form and grace of a nymph, with the modest and retiring mien and blushes of a child. Her superiority, of which she was only vaguely conscious, embarrassed her. She was at the same time proud and ashamed of it. When alone with her mother she was talkative and enthusiastic; in public she was as quiet and mute as a beautiful flower, but her magnificent eyes spoke for her.

After having accomplished, with the aid of God, this charming work, the Marquise de Latour-Mesnil would have asked nothing better than to rest, as she certainly had a right to do; but repose is not for mothers, and the Marquise soon became the prey of a feverish anxiety which

many of our readers will comprehend. Jeanne Bérengère had attained her nineteenth birthday, and it was necessary to begin to think of providing her with a husband. This is undeniably a momentous hour for mothers. That they are greatly troubled and deeply anxious is not what surprises us; it is that they are not even more deeply exercised in mind. But, if any mother does experience intense anxiety at this critical moment, it is one who, like Madame de Latour-Mesnil, has reared her daughter carefully and well; one who, in moulding this youthful body and soul with reverent hands, has refined, purified and, so to speak, spiritualized the instincts of her precious charge. Such a mother must feel and know that a young girl, so pure and perfect in character, is separated from most of the men who frequent our streets and even our salons by an intellectual and spiritual abyss as wide as that which separates her from a negro of Zululand. She must inevitably admit, at least to herself, that

to give her daughter to one of these men is to condemn her to the worst of *mésalliances* and to degrade her own work. Her responsibility, too, in such a case is the heavier since French customs give young girls no opportunity to assume any important part in the momentous transaction of choosing their husbands, and, with a very few exceptions, they at once fall in love with the man who has been selected for their future husband, simply because their imagination endows him with all the qualities they would have him possess.

So Madame de Latour-Mesnil had good reason to feel anxious to marry her daughter well. But it would be difficult to understand what a really virtuous and *spirituelle* woman like the Marquise really means by such an expression, if one did not see every day that the most unfortunate personal experience, the deepest maternal love, the keenest discernment and even the most profound piety do not suffice to teach mothers the differ-

ence between a fine marriage and a good marriage. One may, of course, make both at the same time, and assuredly nothing could be better, but great care is needed, since a fine marriage is often the reverse of a good one, because it frequently dazzles and, consequently, blinds.

A fine marriage for a young person who is to bring, like Mademoiselle de Latour-Mesnil, a dowry of five hundred thousand francs to her husband, means a marriage of three or four millions. Really, it seems as if a woman might possibly be happy with less; still, it must be admitted that it is difficult to refuse four millions when they are offered to you, and Baron de Maurescamp offered six or seven to Mademoiselle de Latour-Mesnil, through the intervention of a mutual friend who occupied a high position in society.

Madame de Latour-Mesnil replied with becoming dignity that she was greatly flattered by this proposal, but that she, nevertheless, must ask a few days for reflection and consideration. But,

as soon as the ambassadress had left the drawing-room, she rushed to her daughter's apartments, strained her wildly to her heart and burst into tears.

"So you have a husband for me?" asked Jeanne, fixing her large, impassioned eyes on her mother, who made a sign in the affirmative.

"Who is the gentleman?" inquired Jeanne.

"Baron de Maurescamp. Ah! my child, it seems almost too good to be true."

Accustomed to regard her mother as infallible, and seeing her so delighted, Mademoiselle Jeanne soon became equally so, and the two poor creatures mingled their tears and their kisses for a long time.

During the week that followed, which Madame de Latour-Mesnil honestly intended to devote to a careful investigation of Baron de Maurescamp's character, she was really occupied almost exclusively in closing her eyes and ears, so she might discover nothing that would disturb

her dreams. Moreover, she received from her relatives and friends such enthusiastic congratulations on the subject of this splendid match, and she read so much anger and jealousy in the eyes of rival mothers, that her approbation was only strengthened. So Baron de Maurescamp was formally accepted.

Much more absurd marriages are often contracted, for instance, those which are concluded, after a single interview in some theatre loge, between two unknown persons who will know one another far too well later. Madame de Latour-Mesnil and her daughter had, at least met Baron de Maurescamp on several occasions in society. They were not intimately acquainted with him, by any means, but they had seen him, occasionally at the play and in the Bois. They knew his name and knew his horses. That was something.

Baron de Maurescamp, moreover, was not without his attractions. He was a man about

thirty years of age, who held quite a prominent position in Parisian society. He inherited his title from his grandfather, a general under the First Empire, and his fortune from his father, who had acquired it honorably in manufacturing. He, himself, thanks to his title, held several very agreeable sinecure positions in prominent financial companies. An only son and a millionaire, he had been spoiled by his mother, his servants and his friends. His confidence in himself, his invulnerable assurance and his large fortune invested him with no little importance in the eyes of the world, and he did not lack admirers. At his club, his opinions were listened to with considerable respect. He was exceedingly skeptical and blasé, and treated everything not of a practical nature with cold and ironical disdain, being in reality profoundly ignorant on all other subjects, and he spoke in a loud and pompous voice, and with considerable arrogance and intolerance of manner. He had formed some rather com-

monplace ideas concerning matters and things in general, particularly in regard to women, whom he despised. These ideas he classified into principles and systems, simply because they had the honor to belong to him. "I make it my rule—It is one of my principles—It is a theory of mine—This is my system!" Such expressions were constantly upon his lips. Had he been poor, he would have been only a very ordinary man; rich, he was a fool.

His choice of Mademoiselle de Latour-Mesnil for a wife may seem strange on first thought, but it was chiefly vanity, though not a little calculation, that influenced him. Parisian society declared Mademoiselle Latour-Mesnil to be a very accomplished young lady. Being in the habit of refusing himself nothing and of appropriating the best of everything, it seemed to him a fine thing to secure possession of this rare flower. Besides, it was one of his theories that the best way to ensure domestic happiness is to marry

a young girl of superior education, nor was this a bad idea; but Baron de Maurescamp was entirely ignorant of the fact that to take one of these choice flowers from the maternal conservatory and transplant it successfully into married life, one must be a horticulturist of the highest order.

Physically, Baron de Maurescamp was a large and handsome man, with a rather too ruddy complexion and rather cumbrous elegance of manner. Strong as a bull, he seemed to desire to increase his strength indefinitely; he exercised with the dumb-bells every morning, practised fencing, bathed twice a day in ice cold water, and displayed a gigantic chest in his low vests with unmistakable pride.

Such was the man to whom Madame de Latour-Mesnil thought it safe and wise to confide the destiny of her angelic daughter. She had, it is true, an excuse which is that of many mothers under similar circumstances: she was a little in

love with her future son-in-law, towards whom she felt very favorably disposed on account of the honor he had conferred upon her daughter. She thought him uncommonly intelligent and discerning since he had known how to appreciate the mind of her daughter, and considered him a very honorable and delicate man for having preferred in the person of her child beauty and merit to more positive attractions.

As for Jeanne herself, she was naturally inclined, as we have said, to accept her mother's choice with all confidence. She was, moreover, like all young girls, quite ready to enrich with her affection the first man who was permitted to love her, to adore him in her own imagination, to reflect upon him her own moral beauty, and to transfigure him, in short, with her own pure radiance.

It must be acknowledged that Baron de Maurescamp, once admitted on the footing of a lover, held his ground by means of the attentions and demeanor that young girls expect from a

pleasing admirer. All fashionable young men with well-filled purses, who are in love, are very much alike. Bonbons, bouquets and jewels are essentials in their eyes. Moreover, even the least romantic instinctively feel that certain concessions to the ideal are necessary on such occasions, and not unfrequently men may be heard to grow eloquent in the presence of their sweethearts, for the first and last time in their lives, as one speaks a special language to children or to little dogs whose favor one desires to gain.

This phase of illusion and enchantment was prolonged through the courtship, and even to the subdued splendors of the marriage ceremony. At that supreme moment, kneeling before the grand altar of Sainte-Clotilde, in the midst of the rare plants that adorned it and under the starry light of the candles, with her hand clasped in that of her husband, and her heart overflowing with grateful piety and happy love, Jeanne-Bérengère's soul soared to Heaven.

It is scarcely too much to declare that, for at least three-quarters of the women in the world, marriage, with the exception of these delightful hours, is a disappointment. But the word disappointment is very weak, when we have to express what an exquisitely attuned heart and soul must experience in conjugal relations with a vulgar man. In regard to the best mode of pleasing women, and of attaching them to their husbands, Baron de Maurescamp had theories which it would be scarcely proper to expound.

CHAPTER II.

DISAPPOINTMENT.

AFTER the first few days, there was a slight coldness in the relations of the newly-wedded pair. With her, it was the bitterness of finding love and passion so different from what she had expected; with him, it was the dissatisfaction of a handsome man who does not find himself appreciated; but Madame de Maurescamp, in spite of the wild tumult that was raging in her heart, always displayed to her mother and the public that serene and unruffled brow which invariably astonishes us in brides, and which certainly proves great power of womanly dissimulation. The organization of her new and superb establishment on the Avenue de l'Alma, the bewildering round of fêtes that followed her marriage, the luxury of her household, her equi-

pages and her toilets, all undoubtedly aided her—for she was a woman—in passing the time immediately succeeding her wedding without too much discouragement and unhappiness. But luxury and splendor, besides not being very new to the daughter of Madame de Latour-Mesnil, are pleasures that quickly pall. Moreover, she had lived with her mother in a too elevated region to be content with a merely fashionable existence, and in the midst of this whirlpool of pleasure she experienced, every now and then, an intense longing for something higher. The most fondly cherished dream of her youth had been to continue with her husband, in the closest and tenderest union of souls, the ideal life into which her mother had initiated her by sharing with him her reading, thoughts and reflections upon all subjects, her beliefs and her enthusiasm in the presence of the grand scenes of nature or the great achievements of genius.

It is easy to understand how little fitted

Baron de Maurescamp was for such a communion. This ideal life, so salutary for every one and so necessary to women, he declined not only from coarseness and ignorance but from principle. For, on this subject, too, he had a theory. It was that a romantic mind was the real and only cause of a woman's fall. Consequently, he believed that everything which tends to stimulate the imagination—poetry, music, art in all its forms and even religion—should be permitted only in the smallest doses. More than once his young wife endeavored to interest him in what interested her. She had a charming voice, and she sang him some of her favorite airs, but if her singing became a little impassioned, he would cry, boisterously :

“No, no, none of that! Not so much expression, my dear, or I shall certainly faint!”

She was very fond of the English poets and novelists; she enthusiastically praised Tennyson whom she adored, and attempted to translate a

passage ; but Baron de Maurescamp, in the same boisterous manner, instantly began to utter cries of "Enough," and to pound upon the piano with both hands so he would not hear her. It was in this way that he intended to disgust her with poetry, but he was certainly much more likely to disgust her with prose. At the theatre, at the various exhibitions and entertainments, and in travelling, he indulged in the same sneers and atrocious witticisms on all subjects that awakened deep emotion in the mind of his wife. Hence Madame de Maurescamp soon fell into a habit of concealing all the feelings that are life itself to all generous and sensitive souls ; and, seeing no more flames without, Baron de Maurescamp persuaded himself that the inward fire was extinguished and glorified himself and his method accordingly.

"Some women are always up in the clouds," he remarked one day to his friends at the club, "and it invariably brings them to grief. I took

my wife young, and have stifled anything like romantic folly. Now she is tranquil in mind, and so am I. Ah! *mon dieu!* a woman should run about, visit the shops, lunch with her friends, ride and hunt. That is the sort of life for a woman: it leaves her no time to think; but if she remains at home moping in a corner with Chopin or Tennyson, there is no hope; you might as well give up. That is my theory."

It was impossible for the inefficacy of this theory and the general intellectual poverty of her husband to escape a discerning mind like that of Madame de Maurescamp, so she was not long the dupe of her husband's important tone and authoritative manner. Men do not always know their wives, but wives always have a thorough knowledge of their husbands. A year had not passed before the last veil had fallen, the last vestige of illusion been destroyed, and Madame de Maurescamp was forced to admit that she was bound for life to a man whose instincts were low

and whose mind was a blank ; but she had a horror of having it known that she despised her husband. A woman who remains an amiable and submissive wife, after such a discovery, deserves a great deal of credit. Madame de Maurescamp displayed this commendable virtue, but to acquire it she was often obliged to remind herself that she was a Christian, that is to say, that she belonged to a religious faith which loves and rewards patience and self-sacrifice.

Nevertheless, she was greatly delighted by an event which occurred about two years after her marriage and which, while promising her precious consolation, also assured her comparative solitude and independence in her domestic life. The birth of a son gave her the only pure and satisfying joy she had tasted since the day of her nuptials ; the only happiness, indeed, that realized the anticipations she had formed in connection with her marriage.

Madame de Maurescamp, as we can very

readily understand, desired to be always with her child, and she fulfilled her duty with the greater pleasure since it enabled her to gain yet more time, and to enjoy a life of quiet and repose that suited her marvellously well. It was about this period that Baron de Maurescamp was surprised to see his wife come down to dinner with a coiffure à la *Titus*. She had had her magnificent hair cut short on the plea that it was falling out, which was not true, but she hoped that this painful sacrifice, by rendering her less attractive, would spare her even greater sacrifices. She had counted without her host. Baron de Maurescamp considered the coiffure extremely novel and becoming; so the poor creature had her labor for her pains, and could only let her hair grow again.

But the deliverance for which she was longing in her secret heart was about to come, and from a source where she least expected it. A noble and attractive woman like herself was well calcu-

lated to inspire, as well as to feel, the deepest, most ardent and most lasting of passions; and was well worthy of a place among the immortal lovers whose imperishable love has been made famous by legends and history, but Baron de Maurescamp's love contained no imperishable element; it was, to use an expression of the day, a realistic love, and realistic loves, though they bear little resemblance to a rose in other respects, are extremely short lived. He had not hesitated to say for sometime that he had married a statue that was very pleasing to the eye, but whose coldness would have discouraged Pygmalion himself; but, in his secret heart, Baron de Maurescamp, who was naturally of a jealous disposition, was not displeased at a circumstance that seemed to him a strong guaranty of domestic security, and as he occupied more agreeably elsewhere most of the time, a gradual estrangement, which the wife made no effort to overcome, separated the pair even more irrevocably.

CHAPTER III.

AN ILLUSION DESTROYED.

WHEN a woman renounces all claim to her husband's love, it is not always prudent to conclude, as did Baron de Maurescamp, that she renounces love in general. After the first disenchantments of an ill-assorted union, a woman recovers from the shock and takes counsel with herself. She often resumes her interrupted dream, once more enthrones her tottering ideal, and says to herself, not without justice, that it is quite unlikely the world would make such an ado about love without reason, and that it is impossible this grand passion, with which history and fable teem, and which has been chanted by all the poets, and glorified by all the arts, should be only a vain and disappointing chimera; she cannot believe that such homage was rendered

to a vulgar divinity, and that so many magnificent altars should have been erected in every age to a commonplace idol. So, in spite of everything, love continues to be the subject that chiefly excites her curiosity and holds possession of her mind. She knows that it exists, that others have known it, and it is difficult for her to resign herself to living and dying without knowing it also.

It is certainly dangerous for a woman to retain and cherish, after the disappointments common to marriage, this ideal of an unknown love; but there is a greater danger, and that is to lose it.

About this time, Madame Maurescamp contracted an intimate friendship with Madame d'Hermany, who was her senior by two or three years. Friendship is the natural resource of a good woman, whose heart is empty. Though pleased with her freshly acquired independence, Jeanne de Maurescamp was only twenty-four, and her soul shrank in terror from the long years of grief and loneliness that stretched before her.

Neither her mother, whom she was unwilling to grieve by even seeming to blame her, nor her son, who was still too young to engross much of her attention, nor even her religious faith, which was already shaken by the ironical indifference of the world, could satisfy the intense longing she felt for a sympathizer and counsellor; hence, she abandoned herself to this new friendship, that seemed to her both a consolation and a safeguard, with all the tender ardor of her enthusiastic nature.

This Madame d'Hermany, whom she honored with her affection, was an extremely attractive person. She belonged to the rare and exquisite type of perfect blondes. Without being tall, she was imposing by reason of the very faultlessness of her beauty, the strange brilliancy of her dark blue eyes, and the intellectual light that shone upon her serene brow and the strange expression of intense disdain that lurked in the corners of her finely cut lips. She had been very unfortunate, it

was said, and in some respects her destiny had been not unlike that of Madame de Maurescamp. Like her, she had married with culpable thoughtlessness; like her, too, she had arrived, though by a different road, at that amicable estrangement so frequent in fashionable households. She had married her cousin, a young man who was quite attractive in appearance, but who had the tastes and habits of a scoundrel. Rumor stated that he had not only continued his dissipated life after his marriage, but that he had forced his wife to share it, perhaps out of a malicious perversity that is not wanting in the world, perhaps simply from sheer folly. He had taken her with him into all the fêtes of a forbidden world, to racing breakfasts and restaurant suppers. It was said that at one of these suppers at which a foreign prince was present, the young wife, incensed at the freedom of language indulged in before her, had boxed the ears of one of the company; some declared the husband to have been the victim, others asserted that it

was the foreign prince. However that may have been, after this famous rebuff, whether he was, or was not, the recipient, Monsieur d'Hermany had requested her to consider herself a widow. To tell the truth, he was rather glad of the occurrence than otherwise, for his wife, whose overwhelming superiority asserted itself in such an unmistakable manner, inspired him with such fear that he was always obliged to drink himself into a state of partial intoxication in order to gain courage to enter her presence.

This story, which partook somewhat of the nature of history, had reached the ears of Madame de Maurescamp, who added to it all that would impart increased interest to the rôle Madame d'Hermany had played. She pictured her as a pure and sensitive young girl plunged into the most depraved society, she fancied her emerging indignant and stainless, and she liked to encircle her friend's lovely brow with the aureole that played around the heads of young

Christian martyrs. Touched and flattered by this worship, Madame d'Hermany returned Jeanne's affection with real sincerity. Witty, highly educated, and artistic in her tastes, she was fully capable of appreciating Madame Maurescamp's merits, and of being a congenial companion. She soon became acquainted with all Jeanne's secrets, and Jeanne supposed she knew all hers. They soon became inseparable: they made calls and shopped together, they occupied the same box at the opera and at the theatre, they attended the races at Sorbonne in company and, when summer came, they both established themselves at Deauville in the same villa.

Here an incident occurred that made a deep impression upon Madame de Maurescamp's mind.

Though their demeanor was characterized by the strictest propriety, the two lovely friends led a fashionable life and were naturally surrounded by admirers. Such a charming team, as Monsieur d'Hermany elegantly remarked, could not fail to

attract admiration. Their acquaintances peopled the coast from Trouville to Cobourg; and Baron de Maurescamp and Monsieur d'Hermany, with the usual intelligence of husbands, always brought some friends down with them on Saturday evening. The homage of all these admirers was accepted in a manner equally removed from prudery and familiarity, and with the quiet and laughing ease that is a characteristic of fashionable women. In the evening, when Madame de Maurescamp and Madame d'Hermany were left alone after the departure of their visitors, they amused themselves, before retiring to their rooms, by passing in satirical review the aspirants of the day. It was what they styled the "Slaughter of the Innocents." Madame d'Hermany displayed actual ferocity on such occasions. Among those she ridiculed most severely was a young man named Saville, who was generally known as "the handsome Saville," and whom she declared to be the most stupid

leader of the German it had ever been her luck to meet. Madame de Maurescamp, who was more lenient in her judgments, thought him a handsome, good-hearted youth, whereupon Madame d'Hermanny laughingly accused her of having a boarding-school girl's fondness for boys. As for her, even if she had not had good reason to be disgusted forever with love and lovers, she could never care for any save a mature man, and she then proceeded to draw of this mature man, whom she might have loved, a stern and magisterial portrait, which fortunately resembled no one.

One evening toward the close of the month of August, Jeanne de Maurescamp retired to her room to write to her mother before going to bed. It was more than an hour after midnight when she finished her epistle. The night was threatening, and, on approaching a window, she saw several magnificent flashes of lightning traverse the horizon and silently descend into

the sea, and at intervals the rumbling of distant thunder, like the roar of a lion in some African desert, broke the stillness. Knowing that Madame d'Hermany enjoyed these sublime spectacles in nature as thoroughly as she did herself, and supposing her still up, (she had told her that she, too, would be writing that evening), she descended to the floor below and rapped gently at her friend's door. Receiving no reply, she concluded that Madame d'Hermany was asleep, and the idea of going down alone to the drawing-room, the better to see the play of the lightning upon the ocean, flashed across her mind. But when on opening the drawing-room door, candle in hand, she saw in the dim light two human forms, she uttered a faint cry of terror which she instantly stifled on recognizing Madame d'Hermany, who sprang towards her and seized her by the wrist, hastily ejaculating: "Hush!" Then turning to a young man who was standing in the middle of the room, she exclaimed: "Go,

go at once." The gentleman bowed and departed through the garden. It was "the handsome Saville."

Madame de Maurescamp, in her intense astonishment at this two-fold revelation, dropped her candle, the flame of which was instantly extinguished; then, after a few seconds of motionless stupor, she sank upon a divan, covered her face with her hands and began to sob bitterly.

In the meantime, Madame d'Hermany was excitedly pacing the room. Suddenly pausing before Jeanne, she exclaimed:

"So you took me for a saint?"

"Yes," replied Jeanne, simply.

Madame d'Hermany shrugged her shoulders and took a few steps; then, turning abruptly, she exclaimed: "Why should you have believed it? How could you have thought for a moment that I could traverse with impunity the slough into which my wretched husband has dragged me?"

Jeanne made no reply ; she was oppressed by a terrible feeling of suffocation.

“Are you suffering, my child?” continued Madame d’Hermany.

“Terribly.”

“Come out into the air, come.”

She took her friend’s hand, forcibly lifted her and dragged her out upon the piazza where she made her seat herself, while she remained standing a few steps from her, leaning against one of the columns that supported the roof. Her eyes were riveted upon the sea, over which the lightning was still flashing at intervals. After a long silence, she again spoke :

“You are mad, my poor Jeanne. You are mad, as I have been, and as we all are at our entrance into life. My husband, after all, has rendered me a service without intending to do so. He has cured me of my fancies, and irretrievably destroyed my ideal. The truth is, my dear, we are absurdly reared. These ethereal educations

give us entirely erroneous ideas of life. There is nothing on earth or in Heaven, I fear, that corresponds with the idea of happiness that is taught us. We are reared like pure, disembodied spirits, and we are only women—daughters of Eve—nothing more. We are obliged to backslide, or to die without having lived. Ah! Good heavens! No one ever began life with a purer soul than mine, I assure you, or with more generous fancies, or loftier aspirations. And what has been the result, what? I discovered, a little sooner than the majority of people, thanks to my admirable husband—I discovered that all this was impracticable and unreal, that no one understood me, that I was speaking a language unknown in our planet, in short that I was the only one of my species—so it became necessary to resign myself to the inevitable, and accept the only real pleasures that this world of ours affords us. After dreaming of an exalted passion I have contented myself with an ordinary one,

because there are no others, because one must fulfil one's destiny—and a woman's destiny is to love and be loved. That is all, my dear! What can you expect? Is not that what you are thinking? I can read it in your large eyes, with each passing lightning flash. What a tragical scene it is, to be sure: the sky and the sea on fire, and I standing here with hair streaming in the wind, baring my head to the thunderbolt! Very poetical, is it not?"

"Why do you tell me, then?" asked Jeanne, who had regained a little calmness during this strange tirade.

"How do I know?" replied Madame d'Hermany. "Ah! thank Heaven, here comes the rain!"

She darted down the three or four low steps, exposing her head to the rain which was beginning to fall with great violence. At the same time, she shook back her long tresses, caught some of the great drops in her two hands and bathed her hot forehead.

“Pray come in, Louise,” said Madame de Maurescamp, gently.

She slowly remounted the steps, and, pausing before Jeanne, said in a curt, almost haughty tone :

“We must bid each other adieu, I suppose.”

“And why?” replied Jeanne, rising. “I do not aspire to reform the world. I only ask that you will never again speak to me of your love affairs or mine. On all other matters we understand each other and agree very well. Your friendship will be a great resource to me, and I hope that mine will be a benefit to you.”

Madame d’Hermany drew her impetuously to her and embraced her.

“Thank you,” she whispered softly.

They went up to their rooms. Two hours later, the dawn found Jeanne seated upon the foot of her bed, her cheeks yet wet with tears, and her eyes fixed upon vacancy.

CHAPTER IV.

A MOTHER'S STRATAGEM.

THERE is nothing that depresses the soul so deeply as the discovery of the unworthiness of those who were to us the personification of goodness and honor, whether they be our parents, our friends or our instructors. When we cease to esteem those upon whom we had bestowed our confidence and respect, we are inclined to doubt the very virtues with which our imaginations had endowed them. False idols make us distrust even religion itself.

It was through this specious but essentially human reasoning that Madame de Maurescamp, after becoming bitterly conscious of her friend's unworthiness, fell into a state of doubt and discouragement that was as painful as it was dangerous. Though she was too proud to sud-

denly break off an intimacy which had been so dear and so public, she was none the less conscious that this friendship no longer existed. She had undoubtedly loved Madame d'Hermans for her real qualities, but far more for those with which her imagination had invested her. The radiant aureole she had placed around her brow had faded forever. She might have forgiven her a passion, even a guilty passion, had the object justified it. She would have pardoned her had the acquaintance been a Petrarch, a Dante or a Goethe, but she could not forgive her "the handsome Saville." She could not forgive her for her hypocritical attempt to cover him with ridicule; above all, she could not forgive her for her attempt to demoralize her, by declaring her pernicious theories with all the pride of a demon, and still less could she pardon her now that she felt her friend had partially succeeded, and that the poison had insidiously made its way into her own veins.

Under the influence of this fresh disenchantment, Jeanne de Maurescamp took out with her into the world fewer illusions than formerly. She watched what was going on around her with more experienced eyes; many reports that she had previously regarded as calumnies now seemed worthy of credence; many acquaintances whom she had considered innocent suddenly became tainted with suspicion. After having supposed that there were many more good people in the world than there really are, she began to think that there were none at all. She began to wonder if it was not, indeed, with her, as Madame d'Hermant had said, if she was not the only one of her species, and if her feelings and her theories in regard to life, and particularly in regard to love, were not merely the result of an artificial education, and of an imagination led astray by the subtle falsehoods of the poets, and if what was commonly called enjoyment was not, indeed, better than nothing.

It is a touching sight to see a conscientious woman, arrived at this almost inevitable stage in worldly life, struggling bravely with herself, and on the point of abruptly falling from a too elevated to a too contemptuous opinion of the human race.

In addition to the philosophers, there are always a goodly number of curious persons who carefully watch all the little dramas they see in progress around them. The world is full of people who have nothing better to do, who, moreover, hope to profit in some manner by the dénouement, and who, therefore, do their best to hasten it. One of the cleverest of this class at that time was the Viscount Monthelin, well known in the fashionable circles of Paris. Monsieur de Monthelin devoted his attention exclusively to love affairs, and this was greatly in his favor in the eyes of the fair sex. He did not play cards, or smoke, or frequent the club, and, when all the other gentlemen repaired to the smoking-

room after dinner, he remained with the ladies. All this gave him a great advantage which he delighted to abuse. He was no longer young, but he was still elegant in appearance and a capital talker, with an exceedingly chivalrous manner, and a heart which was a veritable nest of corruption. He had devoted his already quite extended life to the discovery and undoing of ill-assorted couples. This was his specialty. Two or three duels, one of them an encounter with Count Jacques de Lerne, who had styled him "the drawing-room shark," had added the finishing touch to his reputation.

During the winter that followed the season passed by the two friends at Deauville, it became evident that Monsieur Monthelin regarded Madame de Maurescamp as his next victim. It was seen that he had succeeded in strengthening the ties of friendship that united him to Baron de Maurescamp, even while contracting the circle of his operations around the wife. His calls

at her house towards evening became more frequent; he managed to pass her every morning in the Bois, and invariably presented himself at her box on Wednesday at the Opera, and on Tuesday at the Français.

In her deep mental prostration and despairing loneliness, Jeanne submitted almost without an inward protest to the fascination which a man's fixed and determined will generally exercises over her sex. She felt herself gradually yielding to a sort of vertigo in the midst of the cunning and continuous evolutions that Monsieur de Monthelin was describing around her, and she soon began to grant him the favors which are generally the prelude to a complete abandonment. Thus she fell into a habit of acquainting him with the visits she intended to pay, and with the houses where he could meet her during the day; she also indicated the hours when he would be most likely to find her alone; at balls, as he did not dance, she reserved some sitting dances for

him, that is to say opportunities for a tête-à-tête behind a fan in the shadow of a curtain or under the palm-trees in the conservatory. For want of something better, these little manœuvres caused her a sort of excitement that occupied her mind, and the sense of danger, by its agitating effect upon her nerves, led her to imagine that her heart was really interested. In short, our noble and unfortunate Jeanne was on the eve of a most commonplace flirtation, when a new personage appeared upon the scene.

It was a woman, an elderly woman—the Countess de Lerne — the mother of the same Jacques de Lerne who had been wounded in the duel with Monsieur Monthelin some years before. Madame de Lerne had always been an unprincipled woman, but spitefulness was not one of her faults, though she had plenty of natural shrewdness. She had shown the good taste not to become a prude after having been more than a coquette. Her charity for the weaknesses she herself had known, her

good humor, her excellent judgment, and her rank and fortune assured her a wide-spread popularity in spite of a recollection of the indiscretions of her youth. In her elegant drawing-room she without difficulty assembled the most distinguished men in politics, literature and art; and a limited number of pretty women were added to impart beauty to the scene. Jeanne de Maurescamp, with her striking though refined beauty and her timid superiority, was one of the chief attractions of this model *salon*, and there were no attentions and flatteries that the old Countess did not lavish upon her to attract and detain her there. She had two reasons for this: the first, very laudable, was to increase the popularity of her receptions; the second, less praiseworthy, was to involve her son in a flirtation with Madame de Maurescamp.

She had lost the eldest of her sons, Guy de Lerne, seven or eight years before; the second, Jacques, left Saint-Cyr when his brother died.

His mother being left alone, he had sent in his resignation in order to be with her. He was an exceedingly clever young man, who certainly would have been able, had he felt so inclined, to develop his natural gifts into positive talent. He painted charmingly in water colors, but he chiefly excelled in music, and some of his compositions—waltzes, cradle songs and symphonies—were really of a superior character. But, possibly from natural indolence, possibly from discouragement caused by his interrupted career, he had remained a mere amateur, and what was more had become a blasé man of the world. Except at his mother's house where duty detained him, he was seldom seen in fashionable society, which was not at all to his taste; but he was often seen in lower circles where he appeared to enjoy himself extremely.

Madame de Lerne, we must do her the justice to admit, had at first thought of inducing him to marry; but this seemed so repugnant to him that

she had fallen back upon the idea of interesting him in a friendship which would at least keep him out of bad company. For some little time she had had her eye on Jeanne de Maurescamp with a view to this commendable object, for that lady's unfortunate conjugal experience had not escaped her keen observation, and, without entering into any embarrassing explanation with her son, she had kept this attractive person under his notice as much as possible, neglecting no opportunity to enlarge upon her perfections. But Jacques de Lerne, though evidently struck by Jeanne's remarkable beauty and the superiority of her intellectual endowments, had as yet manifested only a rather careless curiosity, whereupon the Countess, who was watching the young wife attentively and who saw that she was becoming quite fond of Monsieur de Monthelin, resolved to strike a decisive blow, influenced partially by her son's interest and partially by her hatred for the man who had nearly succeeded in killing him.

So one morning she wrote to Jeanne, informing her that, unless she heard from her to the contrary, she would call on her at three o'clock the same afternoon, as she had something of an agreeable as well as an important character to disclose to her. Jeanne, rather astonished at this show of mystery, awaited her arrival with considerable impatience. At the appointed hour she saw the lady enter her boudoir, followed by a footman laden with one of those dainty wicker baskets ornamented with embroidery, fringe and tassels, that are now made for pet dogs. The Countess herself held in her arms with maternal solicitude a tiny dog with long, silky hair, a miniature black and white spaniel, which was said to have been imported from Mexico, and which was the admiration and envy of connoisseurs.

"My dearest friend," began Madame de Lerne, "you have often told me that you were in love with Toby. Permit me to offer him to you with all respect."

"Is it possible!" exclaimed Madame de Maurescamp.

"I have long wondered what I could do to reward such a charming young creature as yourself, for your kindness and fidelity to an old woman," resumed Madame de Lerne in her most caressing manner. "Such devotion is so rare that I am deeply touched by it, deeply touched, and I am very glad to find something that will please you, I assure you."

Jeanne did not very clearly recollect any occasion when she had manifested her admiration for Toby, but she appreciated the sacrifice her friend was making for her sake.

"Ah! Madame, my dear Madame," she exclaimed, "how can I accept such a valuable present? Toby is such a beautiful little creature. And what a sacrifice, and this beautiful basket, too! No, really, really it is quite impossible—"

And to complete her sentence, the graceful young lady threw her arms around her friend's

neck and kissed her, which made Toby bark loudly.

"Come, my pet," said Jeanne, taking him in her arms and covering him with caresses.

The two ladies seated themselves, and Madame de Lerne answered all Jeanne's eager questions in regard to the care and diet of this wonderful Toby. She then inquired concerning the health of Baron de Maurescamp.

"Though I really do not know why I should feel any solicitude on that score," she continued. "One has only to look at him, to see that his health is perfect. His is a superb physique, superb! It does one good to see such a man."

"And how is your son?" inquired Jeanne.

"My son? Ah! he belongs to quite a different order. His is a truly artistic temperament, you know. If that were only all."

"But he is a very good son," Madame Maurescamp said gently.

"Oh! certainly, he is a very good son; there

is no doubt about that. But tell me, my dear child, will you be at liberty to-morrow? It is my reception day. Will you come and dine with us? You will meet your friend, Madame d'Hermanny."

"Gladly! I believe Baron de Maurescamp has no engagement."

"Delightful! I shall count upon both of you."

And Madame de Lerne rose as if to take her leave; but, before doing so, she stopped to bid Toby good-bye, and this gave Madame de Maurescamp an opportunity for another display of gratitude. At last, the word for which Madame de Lerne was waiting, and which she had done her best to extort, fell from Jeanne's lips.

"Dear me! what can I ever do to repay you?"

Madame de Lerne wheeled abruptly around, and, gazing upon her young friend with her most benevolent smile, quickly replied:

"Find my son a wife!"

"Ah! that is an undertaking of which I feel myself utterly incapable," responded Jeanne gayly.

“And why?” returned Madame de Lerne in the same tone. “On the contrary, I fancy you are more capable of the task than any person I know.”

Jeanne opened wide two large, questioning eyes, without replying.

“Yes, I really mean it,” continued Madame de Lerne. “I am satisfied that my son would accept a wife from you more willingly than from any other person.”

“You certainly must be jesting, my dear Madame,” murmured Jeanne, still regarding her with the same air of surprise.

“I am not jesting, and if you had a sister who resembled you, I really believe the affair could be settled at once.”

“I do not understand you, I assure you,” said Jeanne. “Your son scarcely knows me.”

“Excuse me — I really beg your pardon — he knows you thoroughly. My son is very observing, very keen sighted. I know that he appreciates you thoroughly, and I am certain that you

would have a great influence — a very great influence — over him in regard to this question of marriage, and if you should particularly recommend to him any young lady among your friends, I am certain he would take her with closed eyes. I am, upon my word.”

“I do not believe a syllable of it,” exclaimed Madame de Maurescamp.

“And I am sure of it. Try, and you will see.”

Both ladies laughed heartily.

“But, seriously,” resumed the Countess, “I wish you would think of it a little. Run over your list of friends and acquaintances. You would do me a great service, you would, indeed.”

“But first, I must tell you that I am terribly afraid of Monsieur Jacques.”

“What!” exclaimed the Countess, as if stupefied.

“It is the truth. He has such a mocking air, and he is so satirical; besides—”

She hesitated, and seemed considerably embarrassed.

"Besides, he is a man of the world, I suppose you mean," said Madame de Lerne, coming to her friend's assistance.

"Dear me! I do not know; it is no business of mine."

"Yes, he is a man of the world. I confess it, but he has a heart of gold, besides being the most agreeable of companions. Ah! what a good work you would accomplish, my dear child, if you would assist me in freeing him from the clutches of that Lucy Mary, for it is Lucy Mary now, you know."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, of the opera troupe; she plays the part of a page. It is frightful, really frightful, my child. You will know how it is yourself when your own son grows up. In the meantime, try to induce mine to marry; then all will be well. I repeat that, if there is any one in the world capable of performing this miracle, it is you. Good-bye, my dearest."

She kissed her, but, pausing near the door as

she was about to depart, she added: "You will say a word to him to-morrow evening, will you not?"

"I will make the attempt," Jeanne responded.

The Countess de Lerne then withdrew, well satisfied with the opening of her campaign, and she had reason to be, since, for the first time in several months, Jeanne's mind was occupied with some other man than Monsieur de Monthelin. She perfectly understood that Madame de Lerne by her insinuations and feigned reticence, had hoped to make her understand that she had a fervent admirer in the person of Jacques de Lerne. This revelation surprised and interested her, though she could not understand how such a state of things had been brought about. Flinging herself on the sofa, she racked her brain to recall occasions upon which she had met him, the words he had said to her, his manner, and the expression of his eyes, in order to find in these details something that would confirm the strange revelations made by the old Countess. It w

true that this tall, sarcastic young man had always greatly intimidated her; she invariably felt ill at ease and nervous when he approached her; she thought she did remember, however, that he had treated her with a sort of exceptional deference, and that he had spared her the sarcastic jests he bestowed upon other women. She liked the idea of being respected by this blasé man. She thought of his handsome but rather weary and haughty face, his penetrating eyes, and long, drooping moustache, and smiled at the idea of assuming maternal and protecting airs with this formidable personage who had been the terror of her youth, but she said to herself that she should certainly attempt it.

As she sat absorbed in these reveries, smoothing Toby's large ears with her white hand the while, the door opened to admit the handsome form and blue-black side whiskers of Monsieur de Monthelin.

Toby, who had never before seen this gentleman, since Monsieur de Monthelin did not visit at

Madame de Lerne's house, evidently took him for a malefactor, but evinced no fear whatever. He sprang from the lap of his new mistress, and stationed himself bravely before her, barking with all his might, and even snapping viciously at the intruder. Nothing so mars the graceful entrance of a gallant man, especially when he is a candidate for the good graces of his hostess, as a little incident of this kind. Jeanne de Maurescamp, whose perceptive powers were unusually keen, could scarcely repress a smile at the contrast between the amiable air Monsieur de Monthelin strove to maintain and the evident disquietude Toby's attack caused him. Thus Toby, though not a party to Madame de Lerne's conspiracy, contributed in his humble way to ensure its success, for, after such a beginning, Monsieur Monthelin felt that a love scene was impossible; so he confined himself to rather despondent allusions to matters of a sentimental character, and submitted to the necessity of caressing Toby, since it was not in his power to strangle him.

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CHAPTER V.

THE OPENING OF THE SIEGE.

IT was not without considerable inward trepidation that Jeanne de Maurescamp entered the carriage with her husband, the following day, to drive to the residence of the Countess de Lerne. She had been greatly exercised in mind in regard to her toilet, but had finally decided upon an austere costume which would be in harmony with the part she was called upon to play that evening, and a plain velvet robe of a dark plum color was the dress selected, but, unfortunately, her bare arms and shoulders appeared almost dazzling in their whiteness in contrast with the rich, dark fabric, and she felt that this rather detracted from the severity of her appearance; still, this was unavoidable.

Her seat at the table was to the left of Jacques

de Lerne, who had Madame d'Hermany on his right. As she was, to tell the truth, somewhat elated on account of Jacques' secret admiration for her, she soon came to the conclusion that this secret worship was rather too discreet. Monsieur de Lerne scarcely spoke to her, but devoted his entire attention to the neighbor on his right. For lack of anything better to do, Jeanne listened closely to their conversation, and heard Madame d'Hermany, after a spirited exchange of brilliant witticisms, suddenly reproach Jacques for his bad habit of bestowing nicknames upon every one.

"I suppose you have one for me, as well," she remarked.

"There is not the slightest doubt of it," answered Jacques.

"And what is it?" inquired the lovely blonde, turning her angelic face full upon him.

"*L'Eau Qui Dort*: Sleeping Water," replied Jacques in a low tone, as he bent over her.

Madame d'Hermanny blushed ; then, gazing at him with all the candid innocence of a young communicant, she asked :

“ Why Sleeping Water ? ”

“ For no special reason. It is an Indian name.”

“ And have I also a nickname, Monsieur ? ” inquired Jeanne.

“ You ? ” he answered. He fixed his eyes upon her, bowed slightly, and added in a serious tone : “ No ! ”

Then, seeing that she was a trifle embarrassed, he instantly changed the subject, and began to converse with her about the new plays, the museums and the foreign countries he had visited, apparently asking her questions only to have the pleasure of hearing her reply, and gazing at her with a grave and gentle air, as if to encourage her to do her best.

Yes, decidedly, there was something extraordinary about all this. There was, certainly, in the

manner of this person who was conversing with her an indefinable tincture of kindness and esteem, which he seemed to reserve for her alone. Why had she failed to notice this heretofore? How strange it was; the stranger, indeed, from the fact that she was not at all the kind of woman such a man would be likely to fancy. Still, it was very kind on his part, and from that moment Jeanne devoted herself with even greater earnestness and zeal to the task of marrying this young man who, in spite of his evil associates, yet possessed many commendable traits of character. She even passed in mental review the young ladies of her acquaintance, in the hope of finding one that would be likely to suit him, but failed in her efforts just at that moment.

After dinner, several of the gentlemen repaired to the smoking room, and Monsieur de Lerne was following them, when his mother stopped him by saying :

“ Jacques, play your last waltz for Madame

Maurescamp before everybody arrives—she has never heard it. I am sure it will please her very much.”

“Pray do, Monsieur,” said Jeanne.

Monsieur de Lerne bowed and seated himself at the piano. He played his new waltz and several other pieces that Jeanne asked for. As usually happens in such cases, most of the guests, after devoting a few moments of polite attention to the music, resumed their conversation. Madame de Maurescamp alone remained near the piano, which stood at one end of the immense drawing-room.

After the young man had finished a brilliant fantasia, and while his fingers were wandering aimlessly over the keys, Madame de Maurescamp decided that the proper moment had arrived.

“What talent you possess!” she exclaimed; “and you also paint very well, I am told.”

“I dabble in colors a little.”

“How many strange and incomprehensible

things there are in this world," murmured Jeanne, as if talking to herself.

"Is there anything in me, Madame, that suggests this reflection?"

"Yes; you have all the tastes that are likely to attach a man to his home, and you live—at the club."

"True!" responded Monsieur de Lerne.

"Monsieur Jacques," resumed Jeanne, plying her fan more rapidly.

"Madame?"

"You will think me extremely indiscreet—"

"I am exceedingly indulgent."

"Your mother is very anxious to see you married."

"I do not doubt it, Madame."

"And you are not disposed to gratify her?"

"No, Madame; not in the least."

"Have you any reason for this unwillingness?"

"One only: I do not know a single woman in the world worthy of me."

"Good heavens!"

"Pardon me," continued Jacques with the same gravity; "you are, of course, but you are not free, and besides—"

"Well?" insisted the lady, raising her eyebrows.

"Well, even you are very foolish."

"Monsieur Jacques!"

"Pardon me; that is my opinion."

"And why?" asked Jeanne.

"Because you do not display much wisdom in the selection of your friends."

"That means, I suppose, that I do wrong not to choose Monsieur Jacques de Lerne?"

"No, certainly not; and yet, even as I am, I was born to understand and even to share the loves of the angels."

"To speak frankly," replied Madame de Maurescamp, jestingly, "if I am to believe public report, you know very little about the loves of the angels."

"Believe me, Madame, I have been cruelly slandered."

"Seriously, Monsieur, what are your reasons for your general contempt for our sex? Have you any in addition to the one you have mentioned?"

"Yes, I have others," replied Monsieur de Lerne.

He uttered these words in such a peculiar tone that Jeanne cast a quick glance at him, and she was surprised at the almost agonized expression that had suddenly contracted his forehead and lips.

"And formidable ones," he added, with a forced smile.

Then, in a tone of deep feeling, he continued:

"You are a good and an honorable woman whom I profoundly esteem, but I cannot explain these reasons even to you."

She rose, a little embarrassed, remarking gayly, as she adjusted the folds of her dress:

"I really believe I am compromising myself by this protracted conversation."

He rose instantly and said :

"Pardon me for having detained you so long."

"I do not despair yet," she said smilingly, as she moved away.

He bowed without making any reply.

The long conversation between Madame de Maurescamp and Jacques had not failed to arouse the more or less good natured curiosity of Madame de Lerne's guests. Jeanne saw this, and, to allay all suspicions, she remarked aloud to the Countess, as she passed her :

"There is no hope, my dear Madame. I have had my labor for my pains."

Jacques' mother, who had been watching the faces of the pair from a distance with keen interest, was not of Jeanne's opinion. On the contrary, she decided that the lady's efforts had not been wasted, and that there was hope.

CHAPTER VI.

THE POWER OF SYMPATHY.

HOW love is born is no secret, but the birth of sympathy is quite a different and far more mysterious matter. It is well nigh impossible to seize upon the delicate and intricate threads that suddenly bind two hearts and minds together in this mysterious unity of feeling. Though feminine attractiveness is not without its influence, it is by no means indispensable, since sympathy often exists between persons of the same sex, and is not even dismayed by gray hairs. In what secret affinity of tastes, ideas, virtues or vices are we to search for the subtle cause of that sudden bond formed between two persons who are almost strangers, of that spirited interchange of impressions and meaning glances, that readiness to reveal one's sentiments, and

that longing to make a person of whom one knows little or nothing one's confidant? We cannot say, but our readers have understood that Jacques de Lerne experienced it for Jeanne de Maurescamp, and that Jeanne, after their confidential conversation, was not far from sharing it. In spite of the immense distance that seemed to separate them, this man and this woman understood each other almost instantly, and, in spite of the difference in their characters, they felt that there was something in their secret souls that inclined them to the same impressions, the same opinions, the same views of life, the same joys and even the same griefs.

These meetings with congenial persons are among the most delightful features of a worldly life; but, in the change and extent of Parisian relations, the pleasure often lasts only through a dinner or an evening entertainment. People are mutually pleased; they converse freely and enthusiastically together, reveal their secrets, and

almost come to like each other; then they part, not to meet again until the following year, when the acquaintance has to be begun over again. But this could scarcely be the case with Madame de Maurescamp and Jacques de Lerne. They belonged to the same world, and had the same circle of acquaintances; hence they would necessarily be destined to resume their unfinished conversation without much delay.

Besides, Monsieur de Lerne, after reflecting on the subject for two or three days, came to the conclusion that he must pay Madame de Maurescamp a visit. Why did she wish him to marry? What did it all mean? In any case, such a desire on her part was a mark of personal interest that merited politeness and gratitude in return. So he called one evening about five o'clock, only to find Monsieur de Monthelin comfortably installed in the chimney corner. That gentleman, who had already had quite enough of Toby's presence, was exasperated to such an extent by

that of Monsieur de Lerne that he quite lost his wonted composure of manner. He persisted in prolonging his visit indefinitely, in defiance of all the rules of etiquette ; so Jacques de Lerne was obliged to take his leave first, though he had been the last to arrive. Monsieur de Monthelin did not gain much by his obstinacy, for the excessive coldness with which Jeanne treated him after Jacques' departure warned him that he had been guilty of a blunder. To repair it, he made haste, as is usual, to commit a second :

“You seem annoyed at me because I did not give place to Monsieur de Lerne,” he smilingly remarked.

“And with justice,” Jeanne replied. “You came before he did, and remain later. This gives you an air of proprietorship to which you have no claim, so far as I know.”

“That is true. I beg a thousand pardons ; but you know sentiment does not reason.”

“Then it does very wrong. Besides, it seems

to me that your relations with Monsieur de Lerne are of an extremely delicate nature, since your duel with him."

"That is also true; but—"

"By the way," interrupted his hostess, "what was the cause of that duel, if one may be allowed to ask?"

"Oh! nothing—a mere trifle."

"A trifle! What was it?"

"An insulting remark that was repeated to me!"

"Ah! what remark? Are you unwilling to tell me? Do you prefer I should guess it?"

"Then you already know?" inquired Monsieur de Monthelin.

"Certainly."

"It was a vile slander, was it not?"

"No; not altogether."

"I hope he was not the person who repeated it to you, in any case?"

"He is much too honorable for that," was Jeanne's reply.

Monsieur de Monthelin, seeing he was likely to be worsted in the encounter, apologized and took his leave.

In accordance with the Persian proverb, "Make yourself a rarity and you will be highly esteemed," the visits of the Count de Lerne were considered very flattering attentions by those who were favored with them. His charms of person, his wit and talent, and even the slight freedom of his manner made him an exceedingly interesting personage; so Madame de Maurescamp was really vexed that he should have been so poorly entertained at his first visit, and above all, that he should have found Monsieur de Monthelin installed there on terms of almost compromising familiarity.

Though unable to see how it would be possible to speak to Monsieur de Lerne on such an extremely delicate subject, she, nevertheless, waited with great impatience for the following Wednesday, when she counted on seeing him again at his

mother's reception; but, on her arrival at the house of the Countess, she was told that Jacques was confined to his room with a severe headache. Right or wrong, she saw in this circumstance an exhibition of disdain, or at least of ill humor. The esteem of this young man, whose habits were so far from exemplary, had suddenly become so essential to her that the thought of leaving him for any length of time under an unfavorable impression in regard to her seemed insupportable. She was naturally a person of no little decision of character, and, summoning all her courage, she took the old Countess a little aside, and said:

“Ah! well, my dear Madame, I really begin to think that I despaired of your son's conversion too soon. He called on me day before yesterday, and, as he is not much of a visitor, I think he must have had something serious to say to me — that he, perhaps, desired to speak to me in relation to his marriage. But, unfortunately, I was not

alone. I regret this very much, particularly if it was that which brought him to my house."

"Nothing is more probable, my dear child; but, thank Heaven, the misfortune is not irreparable, by any means. When can he have the pleasure of seeing you, if he wishes to call again?"

"Let me see," responded Madame de Maurescamp, knitting her brows. "Well, to-morrow, after dinner. I am not going out to-morrow evening."

"I will tell him, my dearest; be assured I am deeply grateful."

Madame de Maurescamp spent the following morning in bitterly repenting of the step she had taken, for her lonely and sensitive soul was almost appalled by the thought that she had made such a marked advance to Monsieur de Lerne. "If he does not come, how mortified I shall be," she said to herself, "and, if he does come, will he not fancy he is coming to a

rendezvous? Will he not, perhaps, imagine that this question of marriage is only a pretext to conceal a sort of bold challenge?"

Evening came. After dinner, Baron de Maurescamp played a few moments with his son Robert in the drawing-room, and then went out as usual to smoke a cigar on the Boulevard. Jeanne continued to play a series of waltzes and mazourkas on the piano, while her son, in a white dress and blue sash, danced with Toby and his English nurse. She paused abruptly, however, on seeing the door open. It was a servant.

"Is Madame at home?" he inquired.

"Yes. Who has called?"

"The Count de Lerne, Madame."

"Show him in."

She took up her son and kissed him; then she seated herself quietly in an arm-chair, holding the child in her arms as Madonnas hold their infants.

Jacques de Lerne, on entering, beheld this saintly tableau, which must convince him (at

least, Jeanne, hoped so) that the circumstances were more serious and proper than he had, perhaps, been tempted to suppose. He, however, did not seem to experience either surprise or disappointment, and began to caress little Robert as if he had come for that special purpose, and, after a few moments, Madame de Maurescamp decided to send the child to bed, as his services were no longer needed.

Just as the boy was leaving the room, a terrific gust of wind made the shutters rattle violently.

"Listen!" exclaimed Jeanne. "This is a real tempest, and it snows, besides, I believe."

"Yes, it is snowing very hard," replied Monsieur de Lerne. "A place by your fireside is very pleasant in such weather."

"Did I not tell you that you were domestic in your tastes!" laughed Jeanne.

"Ah! there it is again. But tell me, Madame, why are you so anxious for me to marry? Such an idea never entered your head of its own

accord. If I understood you, the other evening it was my mother who first suggested it?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Ah! that is very like her."

He became thoughtful; then, after a pause, he added:

"I regret I cannot oblige you and my mother in this matter, for, as I told you, I do not wish to marry."

"Because there is not a single woman in the world worthy of you, I believe."

"Pray, permit me to explain, Madame. You know in matters of religion, people who do not practise it are the most uncharitable and exacting towards others. There is no such thing as satisfying them. 'If I were in your place,' they say to you, 'I would do this,' or 'I would do that'—in short, they would be perfection. I resemble them in this matter of marriage. I know of no one who regards it as I do, and that is why I renounce it."

“How do you regard it, pray?” asked Jeanne, in a slightly ironical tone.

“You would laugh at me if I told you.”

“I do not think so. Try me.”

“Ah! well, Madame, marriage to me is love, *par excellence*. It is possible that love in marriage may be a dream, but it is the most beautiful of dreams, and if it is even half realized there can be nothing sweeter or more elevating in the world. Such love is the only love worthy of the name, because it is the only one to which religious feeling imparts something enduring, eternal. Divorce, about which people are talking so much at present, is offensive to me on this account. Through it, marriage loses all its sacredness. This feeling is, perhaps, incomprehensible to commonplace or uncongenial souls, but imagine two beings who have chosen each other from all the rest of the world, who understand and please each other perfectly, and who esteem each other—in short, who truly love, and think how much

the certainty of unlimited duration will increase the happiness of their perfect union. It is a charming route which these two dear comrades will follow, and which they see with rapture lose itself in the illimitable horizon where heaven and earth meet. But I weary you, Madame ?”

She shook her head.

“Ah! well,” continued Monsieur de Lerne, “I can conceive of no life richer or more blessed than that of these two travellers, these two lovers, who are, at the same time, friends in the best and truest sense of the word. Their life is absolutely doubled. All their feelings are more intense, all their joys are increased; their griefs alone are lessened. If they are intelligent, as they must be, they will become more so; if they are good, they will become better through mutual sympathy, through a constant interchange of ideas, through a fond emulation and a desire not to lose each other’s esteem. In the degenerate times in which we live, it seems to me that such

an intimate union of two generous and refined souls would be invested with a still greater charm, since they could mutually aid and strengthen each other in keeping their hearts and tastes pure, and in remaining faithful to their ancestors in point of honor, and to the old masters in art and poetry—could admire together that which is eternally beautiful and ignore the rest—could take refuge on the heights as in an ark—could discuss together all that disquiet the heart and mind at this period of the age—could share their beliefs or their doubts—could sometimes talk together of God even, counsel each other, seek Him, or mourn together! You see, Madame, what utter folly is mine!”

Jeanne's attitude, while listening to Monsieur de Lerne, was charming. Leaning slightly forward, she regarded him with great, astonished eyes, as if she saw a delicious spring gush forth before her, and her lips opened as if to drink of it. When he paused, he saw her furtively brush

away a tear that was stealing down her cheek. Deeply moved himself, a sudden and thoughtless sympathetic impulse made him attempt to take her hand, but she gently withdrew it with an air of grave dignity.

"Pardon me," he said. "I thought we were friends."

"Not yet," she murmured.

"Have you not confidence in me? Do I appear like a man who is paying court to you?"

"Every one has his peculiar way," she replied, smiling faintly.

"Confess that mine would be peculiar!"

He began to trifle a little nervously with some knick-knacks that adorned the table, and his eyes falling upon a photograph of little Robert, he took it up and examined it attentively.

"My son is very pretty, is he not?" asked the young mother.

"Charming! Why did you take him in your arms just now to receive me?"

"I do not know. By chance, I suppose."

"No, it was not by chance. You meant to say to me: If you come here as a friend, you are welcome; if you come in any other capacity, this is my answer."

"It is true. Was it not a good one?"

"There could not be a better one," replied Jacques in a voice that trembled slightly. "And if anything surprises me," he continued with singular earnestness, "it is that women are not oftener restrained from folly by the thought of their sons. Do they suppose their sons will not hear of their thoughtless or culpable conduct, sooner or later? And how can you expect a man, who no longer respects his mother, to respect anybody or anything else? When his respect for his mother fails him, everything else fails him; when he loses faith in her, he loses faith in everything else. Ah! if women could only see what is passing in the heart of an unfortunate son when he first learns to distrust his mother!"

Monsieur de Lerne suddenly paused, his voice choked with a sob; and, with the despairing gesture of a man who cannot overcome his emotion, he turned away his head and covered his face with his hands.

Jeanne, like every one else, had heard of the youthful indiscretions of Madame de Lerne, and she understood him.

There was a moment of painful silence; then Madame de Maurescamp suddenly rose from her arm-chair, advanced a few steps and extended her hand to her companion.

He, too, had risen, and their eyes met. He closely pressed the proffered hand, bowed and left the room.

Madame de Maurescamp remained motionless for an instant after this abrupt departure, then took a few wavering steps and sank into a low arm-chair, where, with one hand supporting her head and the other wiping away at intervals the tears that glided down her cheeks, she fell into a

deep reverie. Why did she weep? In the agitation in which this scene had left her, she scarcely knew herself.

The peal of the bell in the hall suddenly made her frown; an instant after the door opened and a servant ushered in Monsieur de Monthelin.

"I learned from Baron de Maurescamp that you would be at home this evening," he began, "so I ventured—"

"You are very kind. Pray come to the fire and warm yourself."

A single glance had sufficed to convince Monsieur de Monthelin that Jeanne had been weeping. It was not the first time he had detected symptoms of this kind in a pretty, young wife who was neglected by her husband, and he had come, not without reason, to regard it as a favorable omen for his personal aspirations. He knew with certainty that the Baron de Maurescamp, for once deserting the *corps de ballet*, had just formed a liking for an American circus rider,

Diana Gray, whose appearance at the *Cirque d'Hiver* had been one of the events of the season. For several days past, she had been seen driving around the lake in the Bois a pair of superb black horses, a gift of the donor of which no one was ignorant, and Monsieur de Monthelin was strongly inclined to think that there was a close connection between this circumstance and Madame de Maurescamp's evident depression of spirits.

The rather grotesque sobriquet, which Jacques de Lerne had bestowed upon Monsieur de Monthelin, may have cast upon this personage, in the eyes of the reader, a tinge of ridicule scarcely justifiable under the circumstances, for he was really an exceedingly crafty and dangerous man. With women he had the singular prestige which so often attaches to a man of his habits, and they seemed to think it more honorable to suffer wrong at his hands than at those of any other person. Without being the possessor of what is

generally termed shrewdness, he had, by dint of severe application and a real taste for his rôle, acquired remarkable skill in ferreting out opportunities and profiting by them. He knew better than almost any one that there are certain hours of mental enervation and depression in a woman's existence, hours when she is, so to speak, defenceless, and when a bold and unscrupulous man may take her at a terrible disadvantage.

Monsieur de Monthelin, in his cunning scheming against Madame de Maurescamp, had been awaiting this fatal hour for a long time with tiger-like assiduity and patience. He believed that it had now arrived. After a few moments spent in a commonplace conversation, in which Madame de Maurescamp took only an indifferent and languishing part, he drew his chair closer to the sofa upon which she was seated.

"You are scarcely listening to me," he remarked. "What is the matter with you?"

“Nothing.”

“You have been weeping.”

“Possibly.”

“Have I not proved myself sufficiently a friend to be made the confidant of your griefs?”

“I have none.”

He gently took her hands, and, coming still closer, he looked her fixedly in the eyes, and murmured:

“My poor child, if you but knew how I love you.”

Suddenly she felt his arm stealing around her, and instantly waking as from a dream, she sprang up and violently repulsed him.

“Ah! my poor gentleman,” she exclaimed, “if you but knew what a mistake you are making.”

It was impossible to misunderstand either the tone of her voice or the expression of her face. The feeling she experienced was evidently the coldest and most pitiless disdain. Monsieur de Monthelin was obliged to acknowledge that for once his boasted penetration had deceived him

There only remained for him to beat an honorable retreat.

"I believe the Count de Lerne has just left here," he said, haughtily. "He has taken his revenge. It is only fair!"

He took up his hat, bowed profoundly and passed out.

Jeanne, left alone, realized for the first time the great and horrible danger she had almost unconsciously incurred. She felt that a few days, or, perhaps, even a few hours before, through discouragement or recklessness, she might have become, without love, without esteem and without excuse, the victim of a heartless man of the world. She realized how near she had been to this terrible abyss, and how far she was from it now. She understood, too, that the tears she had just shed were tears of happiness.

Overcome by a kind of joyous excitement, she suddenly pushed her heavy hair back from her forehead, murmuring brokenly: "I am saved! I am saved!"

CHAPTER VII.

CONGENIAL COMPANIONSHIP.

IT is scarcely necessary to inform our readers, particularly our lady readers, that from the date of that eventful evening, and without any other explanation, a firmer and more intimate friendship united Jeanne and Jacques de Lerne.

Jeanne entered upon a new and delightful phase of her life. She seemed to have renewed her youth, with all the illusions, faith and enthusiasm of feeling that had characterized it; she had found her wings again. Nothing could have borne a stronger resemblance to her most delightful dreams than the sentiment which now bound her to Monsieur de Lerne. Their two souls were in as perfect accord on all important and delicate points as if one were completely under the magnetic influence of the other. It soon became

evident to Jeanne that Jacques, as well as herself, really lived only in the hours they spent so happily together. She comprehended this by the sudden radiance that overspread his face on perceiving her, by the tenderness in his voice, and the gentle and respectful pressure of his hand. She saw that he sought her society as much as he possibly could without compromising her, and that he was equally tortured by his eagerness and his scruples. She also noticed that his tastes had changed, and that, to gratify her, and above all, to meet her, he had become a frequenter of social gatherings. She was pleased and grateful for all this, and still more so for the reserve of manner and language which he always displayed in her presence. No word of idle gallantry, but a tone of profound respect and a most flattering attention characterized his conversation when it was addressed to her, a charming way of making her understand, without putting it in so many words, that she

was so superior to everybody and everything that it was impossible to converse with her on the same trivial, commonplace topics one pursued with other people.

She heard one day that he had broken off his intimacy with Lucy Mary. This news pleased while it troubled her. She asked herself if this sacrifice, which had probably been made for her sake, did not place her in a false position in regard to Jacques. She blamed herself, too, for thus accepting his entire life when she could not give him all her own. To appease her troublesome conscience, she, by a heroic effort, resolved to employ all her powers of persuasion in urging his marriage. She reminded him, therefore, that she had accepted the task of finding him a wife, and that her success in the undertaking was a question of honor with her.

“Besides,” she added, “you treated me to a very edifying discourse on matrimony one evening, and it would really be a pity if such a fine

programme were not carried out, at least once in a lifetime."

"But do you not see that I am trying to realize it with you?" he asked.

She blushed deeply, and looked at him with a sort of frightened distrust she had never before manifested.

"Pray, do not misunderstand me," he continued. "I have placed your son between us. It would be impossible for me to be other or more than a friend to you without shamefully dishonoring myself in your eyes as well as mine—I should prove myself the vilest of hypocrites. You, yourself, must see that it is impossible."

"Thank Heaven!" she replied; "but another thing that I fear is also impossible is for friendship to fill a man's heart and life. I feel that it is cruelly selfish in me to allow you to sacrifice your whole heart and future for so slight a return."

"Waste no compassion on me, Madame," he

replied, gayly. "I assure you I deserve none. Mine is a strange nature, and, had I lived in a different age, I should undoubtedly have been one of those who immure themselves in the cells of a cloister after a wild and reckless youth. Such men certainly did not have the consolation of a friendship like yours. Allow me to say, in perfect sincerity, that you are my refuge and my salvation. The life of a fashionable young man of the present day is made up of a continual round of dissipation, of which I have been able to accept my share, but of which I am thoroughly weary. I was gorged to repletion. I felt as if I was rolling in the mire. In short, I was haunted by an elevated and even austere ideal life, and I find it in the feeling I entertain for you; for this sentiment, which is love, I fear, is also a religion. So have no uneasiness, and, above all, be happy. Care for me a little, and let us say no more about it. I am going to read you a page of your favorite Tennyson, one of the purest of poets. His

is a style perfectly adapted to the present circumstances."

Another evening, some months later, it was she who reassured him. She was to leave for Dieppe the following morning, to spend several weeks with her mother and her son, and Monsieur de Lerne had called to say good-bye. Though their separation was to be short, she could not help feeling some slight emotion and secret dread. Fearing, apparently, that she might evince more tenderness than was desirable, her reserve verged upon actual coldness. Surprised at her rather mocking and constrained manner, Monsieur de Lerne became silent and ill at ease, and soon rose to take his leave. As they shook hands, she detected an expression of anxiety and distrust in his eyes.

"I will wager that I can read your thoughts," she said, smiling.

"Let me see."

"You were wondering if I, in turn, was not

going to say to you what a certain fair lady once said to her adorer, who granted her tearful entreaties that no shadow of evil should sully the purity of their relations, and to whom she, the next moment, bade a final farewell, with the words: 'Adieu, simpleton.'"

"It is true, and, perhaps, you would have been quite right, for we have both displayed a lack of wisdom, I fear."

"Oh! do not say that; you do not really mean it. On the contrary, I thank you so much; I am so grateful to you. You have been of so much service to me, my friend. I shall esteem you, and I shall bless you with all my heart. And now, farewell. Write to me."

It was thus that they mutually encouraged each other in seasons of weakness and despondency.

Determined to give the purest and most elevated character to their relations, Jeanne had requested Jacques to mark out a course of study and reading for her, and he spent his time during

her absence in collecting a small but choice library, in which the writers of the Seventeenth Century occupied the place of honor between the best critical essayists of the present day and several of the greatest historians. This formed the subject of their correspondence during Jeanne's sojourn at Dieppe. After her return, she devoted herself to her reading with great ardor, and, henceforth, there was another bond between her and Jacques, the bond that unites teacher and scholar, for Monsieur de Lerne, who was unusually well educated and well read, proved an admirable guide and commentator; and from that time forth their conversations, harmony of taste, and their discussions on literary and historical subjects, imparted an increased zest to their pleasant companionship.

CHAPTER VIII.

A LONG SOUGHT OPPORTUNITY.

THESE consolatory friendships which are the solace of so many unhappily wedded women certainly require, for their prolonged continuance, eminent superiority of character and, perhaps, also, such exceptional circumstances as those which had brought Madame de Maurescamp and Jacques de Lerne together. Still, these heroic attachments are not without example in the world, though the world has but little faith in them. People generally have but a meagre appreciation of merits which are above the average, their own measure. Besides, these innocent loves are more open than others; disdaining hypocrisy, those who indulge in them are consequently even more likely to be slandered and misjudged. Consequently, it was

not at all surprising that the public judged the delicate relations that existed between Jeanne and Jacques with its accustomed coarseness and skepticism; but if there was in society at large a man utterly incapable of understanding distinctions of this kind, that man was the Baron de Maurescamp. Despite the fact that he was naturally of a jealous disposition, though his jealousy arose rather from vanity than from a love for his wife, he had never thought of distrusting his friend Monthelin, who had so greatly imperilled his honor, but, with the usual discernment of his class, he did not fail to be horrified at the blameless intimacy between his wife and the Count de Lerne. He instinctively detested Jacques, who was his superior in every respect; he had often had him for a rival, and for a favored rival, in certain fashionable circles where talent and elevation of sentiment still maintain their prestige; and it seemed hard to Baron de Maurescamp to find that this

tiresome fellow had carried the rivalry into his own home ; and it must be admitted that, had he not been the most negligent and culpable of husbands, his sensitiveness in this respect would certainly have been excusable. On more than one occasion, Jeanne had noticed the ill humor her husband manifested on witnessing Monsieur de Lerne's attentions, but had given herself little uneasiness about it. Several times during her stay at Dieppe, however, she had shown him the letters she received from Jacques, in order to reassure him by demonstrating the purely friendly character of their relations. To convince him more effectually, she had even taken pains to devise pretexts to detain him in the drawing-room in order to divest Jacques' visits of any appearance of secrecy, but these precautions had utterly failed to produce the desired effect. Baron de Maurescamp naturally felt very uncomfortable and out of place in their presence ; he was irritated and annoyed on account of the

inferior rôle he found himself forced to play on such occasions, and, after shrugging his shoulders and uttering some coarse or disparaging remark, he generally took himself off. At such times, the truth presented itself so forcibly that he was almost compelled to believe that their relations were purely intellectual, but this did not prevent him from nourishing a sullen and intense hatred against Monsieur de Lerne that was only waiting for an opportunity to burst forth.

Unfortunately this opportunity soon presented itself. As we have said, Baron de Maurescamp for more than a year had been infatuated with Diana Gray, a young American *equestrienne*, who was at that time the rage in Paris. This creature, who was the daughter of a second-rate acrobat, and who had been cradled in the mire, had, nevertheless, the fresh, pure beauty of a lily. Pale, with delicate and refined features, a classical perfection of form, and an unbounded natural depravity with which a sort of Anglo-Saxon

ferocity was mingled, she had by reason of these attributes subjugated Baron de Maurescamp completely, and inspired him with one of those intense and servile passions which are generally confined to old men, but which blasé young men sometimes experience, probably on account of premature imbecility. She had captivated him at first by her personal charms and her popularity; she completed her conquest by the absurd caprices with which she tormented him. There are some men, who like Sganarelle's wife, enjoy being beaten. Baron de Maurescamp was one of the number apparently, and he was certainly gratified to the utmost by the pretty American. Diana Gray, had she so chosen, could have forced him through the paper-covered rings through which she herself jumped every evening at the circus performance, but she preferred to make him give her a handsome residence on the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, and the means to maintain such an establishment comfortably.

Early in April, this singular person conceived the idea of inviting some friends to breakfast. She herself made out the list of guests, and, to the great annoyance of Baron de Maurescamp, she inserted the name of Count de Lerne, with whom she was but slightly acquainted, but who had been much talked of in her presence, for he had left behind him in Parisian Bohemia the reputation of an exceedingly agreeable companion and extremely gallant man. Jacques had entirely broken off all associations with the society of which Diana Gray was the leading star, but he accepted this invitation.

Diana Gray placed Monsieur de Lerne on her right, and, from the very beginning of the repast, manifested a marked predilection for his society. Jacques spoke English perfectly, and she seemed to take infinite pleasure in conversing with him in that language, with which Baron de Maurescamp had not the advantage of an acquaintance. Jacques endeavored to evade the rather oppres-

sive attentions of his neighbor as much as possible, and tried to speak French. This she would not do, but resolutely continued the conversation in English, drinking to his health in alternate glasses of pale ale and port. At the same time, she cast exasperating and almost contemptuous glances at Baron de Maurescamp, who was seated at the centre of the table opposite her, and who was evidently deeply incensed.

The entertainment was somewhat of a failure, the mistress of the house being the only person who seemed to thoroughly enjoy it. As soon as the repast was ended, Jacques de Lerne, eager to make his escape from such an unpleasant situation, pleaded a business engagement and withdrew.

After his departure, Diana Gray lighted a cigarette, and, throwing herself carelessly upon a divan, sipped her port there. She saw that Baron de Maurescamp was sulky, and to set matters right she said to him, in a loud voice and with a slight accent:

"My boy, the Count is very attractive. Do you know I have taken quite a fancy to him? I think I will cultivate a flirtation and become some one's rival."

"You are crazy, Diana," said Baron de Maurescamp, turning very red, "and you forget of whom you are speaking."

And little rings of smoke continued to ascend tranquilly from her rosy lips to the ceiling.

"She really is affected," one of the guests remarked to Baron de Maurescamp. "It is a pity; otherwise she would be perfect."

An hour later, after every one had gone, Diana Gray secretly informed Baron de Maurescamp that she was sorry for what she had said, and consequently it was of no importance whatever, after which she asked his forgiveness and obtained it.

Baron de Maurescamp had not only long since ceased to love his wife, but had long since begun to hate her, for in these ill-assorted mar-

riages uncongeniality rarely ends in indifference, but the cynical and insulting words uttered by Diana Gray were well calculated to exasperate him. Though not very lavishly endowed with imaginative powers, he, nevertheless, had enough to picture the wife, from whom he had encountered naught but rather contemptuous coldness, experiencing the liveliest transports of passion for another, and this, which would certainly be far from agreeable to any one, was intensely exasperating to a man as vain, haughty and arrogant as Baron de Maurescamp. He forgot to remind himself that it might be rather unjust to make his wife's peace, honor, and, perhaps, her very life depend upon his whims; but the anger, jealousy and hatred which had long been accumulating in his heart against his wife and Jacques de Lerne burst forth in ungovernable fury, and he resolved to put an end to their intimacy by wreaking vengeance on both of them. An opportunity for a duel with

Jacques seemed to him singularly fortunate, since the incidents that had occurred at the breakfast furnished him not only with a plausible excuse, but with one which had the two-fold advantage of leaving Madame de Maurescamp's name entirely out of the quarrel, and giving him the choice of weapons. He was remarkably skilful in the use of the sword, and, though naturally brave, he was not disposed to neglect such an advantage.

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CHAPTER IX.

THE CHALLENGE.

BARON DE MAURESCAMP walked down the Champs-Élysées, almost blind with rage and savagely gnawing the end of his cigar. Twenty minutes later he entered the club-house, where he found several of his companions of the morning, among them Messieurs de Monthelin and d'Hermany, with whom he at once held a private conference. He informed them, in the strictest confidence, that he considered himself insulted by the Count de Lerne's unbecoming conduct towards Diana Gray, and his persistent use of the English language during the entire meal, when he was perfectly well aware that he, de Maurescamp, was not acquainted with that tongue—in short, by de Lerne's behavior in general, which had been so impertinent as to

border upon insult. These gentlemen raised no objection on account of the trivial nature of these grievances, understanding that they concealed others of a more serious nature which it was advisable to keep in the background. Baron de Maurescamp added that he made it a rule to settle such affairs with the least possible delay, so there would not be time for the difficulty to be noised abroad, and so as to prevent the always-to-be-deplored intervention of women. Consequently, he entreated these gentlemen to do him the favor to wait upon Monsieur de Lerne immediately, and perform the mission entrusted to them.

Monsieur de Monthelin replied that his former difficulty and duel with Monsieur de Lerne obliged him to decline to act in this matter. Baron de Maurescamp admitted this, and he then called into requisition the services of another friend, Monsieur de la Jardye, who was also a member of the club, and who was sum-

moned from an adjoining room. Monsieur de la Jardye delighted in these opportunities to display his importance. He endeavored, for form's sake, to say a few words in favor of a reconciliation; but he also had been present at Diana Gray's breakfast, and he concluded by saying that, since his candid opinion was asked, he must admit that certain things had occurred at the breakfast which his friend, Baron de Maurescamp, must certainly find rather difficult of digestion, and, for this reason, he was quite willing to serve him in the capacity of a second.

Monsieur de Lerne was blissfully ignorant of the treat that was in store for him. He quietly took his daily walk in the Bois and returned home about six o'clock. There, considerably to his surprise and annoyance, he found the cards of Messieurs de la Jardye and d'Hermany, enclosed in a sealed envelope, with this little note in pencil:

“Called in relation to a personal matter in

behalf of Baron de Maurescamp. Will have the honor of returning about half past six."

Jacques did not need much time to fathom the mystery. Though he was ignorant of the base insinuations made by Diana Gray after his departure, Baron de Maurescamp's irritation at the breakfast had not escaped his notice, and, with the quick discernment peculiar to persons of a lively imagination, he instantly comprehended the real situation. Baron de Maurescamp had eagerly seized the first available pretext to satisfy his wrath as a jealous husband, without compromising the good name of his wife. Monsieur de Lerne had nothing to say against this. He at once wrote to two of his friends, Jules de Rambert and John Evelyn — the last an Englishman — dispatched the letters with all possible speed, and had the satisfaction of seeing both gentlemen appear a few moments after the arrival of Messieurs de la Jardye and d'Hermany, whereupon he left the four together, and retired to an adjoining room to await their decision.

The affair was one of those that do not necessitate a prolonged discussion, since all the parties interested knew that the ostensible cause of the quarrel concealed the real one, which, by mutual consent, was neither discussed nor even mentioned. To the statement made by Monsieur de la Jardye and his friend Monsieur d'Hermany, in behalf of Baron de Maurescamp, Messieurs de Rambert and Evelyn replied, in the name of their friend, that the alleged grievances were purely imaginary; but, at the same time, as Baron de Maurescamp considered himself insulted, Monsieur de Lerne could only bow to his decision. Moreover, Monsieur de Lerne, like Baron de Maurescamp, was of the opinion that the affair should be settled as soon as possible, and before it could come to the knowledge of the public. In regard to the choice of weapons, Monsieur de Lerne's seconds were not quite as accommodating, they having received from Jacques, under a pledge of secrecy, a very important disclosure.

"On principle," he had remarked to them, "I accept the sword, I accept anything; but you know I was wounded in the right arm two years ago, in my duel with Monthelin. Since that time, I have been troubled by a slight weakness in that arm. It is a mere trifle and depends greatly upon the weather, but it may be a disadvantage to me in such an encounter. To demand pistols on the plea of such an infirmity, is impossible, for it is so slight as not to be apparent. Every day people see me touch the piano with a firm hand, and every one would believe that I had invented this pretext to escape the sword of Baron de Maurescamp, as he handles that weapon very adroitly. So, for the sake of your honor and mine, not a word about my arm! But, if you can secure the pistol by any honorable means, I shall be very glad."

It was, therefore, necessary to convince Baron de Maurescamp's seconds that, under the circumstances, there was some real doubt as to which

of the two adversaries was the offender and which the aggrieved party. Was not this challenge, which Baron de Maurescamp had sent to Monsieur de Lerne on account of incidents so undeniably trivial, of such an absurd character as to constitute the real aggression? Consequently, it appeared to them only just and proper that the choice of weapons should belong to the party thus palpably wronged, or, at least, be left to chance. Messieurs de la Jardye and d'Hermany replied with cold politeness that such a transposition of rôles in this unfortunate affair could not be seriously entertained for a moment, and that a persistent refusal to recognize the rights of their friend as the aggrieved party was equivalent on Count de Lerne's part to a refusal to grant him reparation, a thing that certainly could not enter into his plans. Messieurs de Rambert and Evelyn thought it impossible to insist further. Afterwards, there were many conflicting opinions as to whether or not they were right.

Some declared that Monsieur de Lerne's seconds being aware of his infirmity, however slight it might have been, should not have allowed him to engage in this combat under conditions that were manifestly unequal; others, men whose opinions on such subjects were regarded as conclusive, maintained that, in such a case, it was the paramount duty of the seconds to obey the instructions of the party they represented, and who had intrusted them first with the care of his honor, and secondly with the care of his life.

It was, therefore, decided that the combat should be with the sword, and that the meeting should take place at three o'clock on the afternoon of the following day, at Soignies, on the Belgian frontier.

Jacques listened to the result of this conference without any show of disappointment, thanked his friends for their well-meant efforts in his behalf, gayly assured them that he should come out all right, and requested them to meet him at the

Northern Railway Station at seven o'clock the next morning.

But, when he was once more alone, his countenance assumed an expression of deep seriousness, which the circumstances certainly justified. From a natural, but, perhaps, too keen sense of honor, he had been unwilling to confess the whole truth in regard to his wounded arm. The fact was that any prolonged exercise, especially in fencing, brought on a weakness and numbness in this unfortunate member, which, in a combat with a skilful and powerful swordsman like Baron de Maurescamp, must place his adversary in a position of decided inferiority. Monsieur de Lerne faced this prospect with a firm heart, but, though he did not abandon hope or look upon himself as a dead man, he made no attempt to close his eyes to the fact that he was about to incur a great risk.

He made his preparations accordingly. Fortunately, his mother was dining out that evening ;

he loved her though he had suffered greatly through her, and he congratulated himself that chance had spared him the cruel constraint her presence would have imposed upon him. But there remained for him to undergo that same evening an equally, if not more painful test.

Madame d'Hermanny was to give a grand ball, and it had long since been agreed that Madame de Maurescamp and Jacques should meet there.

They had even renewed the engagement in the Bois that afternoon, and, for more reasons than one, Monsieur de Lerne decided that he must not fail to attend this ball. He not only feared that his failure to do so would disappoint Jeanne and arouse her anxiety, but, if any vague rumors in relation to the duel of the morrow were already in circulation, his presence would suffice to silence them. But, more than all this, it seemed to him that Jeanne's reputation demanded this courageous effort, for, since Baron de Maurescamp

had made Diana, and not his wife, the pretext of their quarrel, Monsieur de Lerne thought the best way to aid him in his plans, and to deceive the public, was to show himself in society that same evening with Madame de Maurescamp, on the same terms as usual. Though this would cost him dear, he regarded it as a duty imperatively demanded by delicacy.

CHAPTER X.

MADAME D'HERMANY'S BALL.

HE wrote two letters, one to his mother, the other to Jeanne, and at eleven o'clock he entered the Hôtel d'Hermany, on the Avenue Gabriel, with a smiling face and dressed with scrupulous care. The master of the house, one of his adversary's seconds, opened his rather dull eyes in astonishment on beholding this unexpected guest; but he soon recovered himself and greeted him with extreme cordiality, thinking, as he said later, that the thing was plucky and courageous, and proved de Lerne to be the possessor of a strong stomach.

The fair-haired Madame d'Hermany, more beautiful and unscrupulous than ever, seeing that Monsieur de Lerne seemed to be searching for some one in the crowd, looked him full in the

eyes, and said, concisely: "Second door to the left—in the conservatory under the third palm on the right. Now, say that I am not kind!" He bowed gravely and followed her instructions.

The conservatory was connected with the *salons* by two arches, one of which had been reserved for the orchestra. The conservatory itself was really an immense *salon* surmounted by a dome, and containing a magnificent collection of enormous blue vases on gilded pedestals, superb bronze urns and statuary, half concealed in the rich verdure, while low divans, surrounded by ottomans and folding-chairs, stood beneath the large fan-shaped leaves of the palms, the drooping vines full of white, wax-like blossoms and the glossy foliage and heavy white corollas of the magnolias. The air was saturated with the warm, damp perfume of a tropical forest, and from the groups of talkers, sitting here and there, rose a murmur of voices which sounded like the humming of a hive of bees, and which, occasionally,

broke forth into loud bursts of merriment that effectually drowned the deeper notes of the orchestra.

In one of these groups, under the third palm on the right, sat Jeanne de Maurescamp, listening rather abstractedly to three or four admirers of different ages. On perceiving Jacques, her face suddenly brightened, and that radiant smile which women reserve for their favorites illumined her features. This smile sufficed to reassure Jacques, and convince him that any rumor in relation to the event of the morrow had not yet reached Jeanne's ears.

On the arrival of Count de Lerne, the stars of lesser magnitude, that had been revolving around the lady, gradually passed into a state of eclipse with a feeling of mingled vexation and deference, for, though the relations of Madame de Maurescamp and Jacques were the subject of much talk, people instinctively felt that they merited respect. But, before he found himself

alone with Jeanne, Monsieur de Lerne had abundant time for some rather bitter reflections. Standing before her now, he was so deeply struck with her beauty that it seemed to him, he saw and admired her for the first time. She wore, with the chasteness of Diana, the evening costume of the time, the diminutive corsage of which revealed her white, perfect shoulders and exquisitely moulded arms in all their matchless beauty. Her dark hair, which grew rather low on her forehead like that of the goddesses, was simply twisted into a heavy knot at the back of her head, which she held slightly thrown back, in a proud, almost triumphant attitude. She felt that she was looking her best, that she was beautiful—and her pearly teeth gleamed between the crimson of her rather full lips as she smiled exultantly at the knowledge. In the presence of this charming creature, so richly endowed with graces of mind and person, Jacques could not repress a sudden and almost savage paroxysm of

admiration, regret and anger. He had respected her. He had done violence to his own feelings. He had displayed this mad heroism, and this was his reward!

With the quick and marvellous intuition of a woman, Madame de Maurescamp seemed to read something of this in the young man's ardent and troubled eyes. A faint blush suffused her olive cheeks, and, fluttering her fan with a slightly embarrassed air, and lifting her face almost timidly to his, she said:

"You have not your good eyes this evening. What has changed you?"

"You are so beautiful that you overwhelm me!" Jacques replied, in a low voice.

"Your astonishment will soon pass off," she rejoined, laughing. "But no remarks of that kind, if you please, my friend. Have you become a materialist again?"

"Yes, in a measure; at least, during the last quarter of an hour."

“Do you know that you pain me?”

“Ah! I fear I am not one of the pure-minded,” he said, seating himself.

“But I am,” she replied, with the frank, joyous laugh of a child, “and I am also one of the few who find life an enchantment; and it is all due to you.”

Then, suddenly, and in a tone of deep feeling, she exclaimed:

“Ah! if I were only sure that you were happy, my friend, as happy as I am! That is what I was saying to myself just before you came in.”

“Are you, indeed, so happy?” he asked, in a voice that faltered slightly.

“Happy, happy, happy!” she responded, with charming enthusiasm; “and through you! You may give yourself all the credit of it. There are moments when I am even frightened by my happiness, it is so intense. Think a moment,” she continued, lowering her voice a little:

“I love, I am beloved, and all this without agitation, in peace, and without present remorse, or fear concerning the future, for, thanks be to God, and to you, my friend, I shall see without terror that first wrinkle which is the spectre and the chastisement of ordinary loves. I shall grow old contentedly, almost joyfully, because, as I grow old, I shall be more free, less fettered by *les convenances*. For instance, I have a delightful dream of taking a journey with you some day, and to do that, you know, I must be old! But, in the meantime, if you only knew the transformation that has taken place in the world, and in my own life! Pray, take some pride in the miracle you have accomplished. It seems to me that all my senses, and, indeed, my entire being, have been modified, elevated and purified; that you have taught me—how shall I express it?—the divine sense of things; that you have taught me to see the noble side of everything that exists, everything of which my sense of

vision and my mind are cognizant. Hence, I have joys unknown to all the rest of the world, the joys of heaven itself, the happiness of the angels! Everything upon which my eyes rest is illumined with new splendor and clothed in a beauty I never knew before. It is an absurd fancy, of course, but, sometimes, while driving in the Bois, I look at the trees which never before excited my admiration, and I say to myself: ‘Ah! how beautiful and grand a tree is! how graceful, how full of life and vigor!’ There is not an object in nature, not a blade of grass that does not fill me with wonder and ecstasy! I am sure—do you not agree with me?—that everything in the world has two faces: one, to a certain extent, material and commonplace, which is visible to every one; the other, which is mysterious and spiritual, and which is the secret and the mark of God. It is this that my eyes now behold, and for this happiness I am indebted to you. This is your work, my friend!”

Even while he listened with secret anguish, Jacques' countenance gradually assumed a gentle and serious expression.

"Yes," he said, slowly, in a slightly changed voice, fixing a look of infinite tenderness upon her, "there must be a God, a better life and immortal souls, since there are beings like you."

Then, suddenly, he exclaimed: "Good heavens! are you ill?"

He feared so, for she had suddenly become as white as marble, and her eyes seemed to be riveted upon some frightful apparition. Monsieur de Lerne hastily turned and saw Baron de Maurescamp standing motionless in the arched doorway leading into the conservatory. He was watching them intently, and his eyes and inflamed features revealed such frantic rage that Monsieur de Lerne instantly rose, fearing some immediate act of violence.

Not until then did Baron de Maurescamp

advance slowly towards them, evidently struggling against an almost irresistible paroxysm of passion, but, as he approached under the wondering glances that were directed upon him from every side, and in the death-like silence that suddenly filled the room, he succeeded in partially controlling himself, and, on reaching his wife, he merely said, in a rather harsh and sullen voice :

“Your son is ill ; come.”

Jeanne uttered a slight cry, then began to ply him with hurried questions, but, quickly comprehending from his manner and his confused replies that the child's illness was only a pretext, she followed him without another word.

Baron de Maurescamp, after dropping in for a few moments at the opera, had gone to his club. There, by the merest chance, he happened to hear of Count de Lerne's presence at the d'Hermanny ball. He knew that his wife was going there, and, being destitute alike of delicacy of mind and of heart, he had not even suspected

the honorable motives that had prompted Monsieur de Lerne's conduct. He saw in it only an act of insolent bravado in which his wife was an accomplice, and he rushed to the Hôtel d'Hermant without any definite plan, but impelled to do so by a paroxysm of hatred and rage which would not have recoiled at anything, not even public scandal.

CHAPTER XI.

A VAIN APPEAL.

WHILE the news of Madame de Maurescamp's enforced departure with her husband was going the rounds of room after room in whispers mingled with stifled laughter, Baron de Maurescamp flung himself heavily down upon the seat of the coupé beside his wife. As soon as he was freed from the presence of witnesses, he ceased to speak of his son; and his silence and his almost ferocious manner prevented the slightest attempt at a remark from his unfortunate wife. She experienced an unspeakable distress of mind: it was the bewildered astonishment of a young creature suddenly struck down in the fulness of life, happiness and innocence; the sorrowful indignation of a virtuous woman publicly insulted; the vague fear of some un-

known and terrible catastrophe. In this nameless trouble, she remained mute, waiting for him to speak, but she waited in vain, and the journey from the Avenue Gabriel to the Avenue d'Alma was made without the interchange of a single word.

But Jeanne's naturally courageous soul soon began to recover from the bewilderment into which her first surprise had thrown her. She traversed the large and resounding hall of her home with a firm step under the eyes of three or four motionless valets, and ascended the stairs in silence, but when, on reaching the floor above, upon which her apartments were situated, she saw that her husband, whose rooms were above hers, was intending to pass up and leave her, she said, quietly :

"Will you come in? I wish to speak with you."

He hesitated a moment, for, like the majority of his sex, he was not fond of explanations, but

his character was really violent rather than strong, and his wife's calm and resolute voice awed, even while it irritated him, so he followed her into her room, though not without increased anger. She closed the door after him and passed into the boudoir that communicated with her sleeping room; then she returned and, looking him full in the face, said:

"Well, what is the meaning of this?"

"Simply that I shall kill Monsieur de Lerne to-morrow morning; that is what it means."

She struck her hands violently together, and continued to gaze at him, with parted lips, like one dumb with astonishment.

"You have defied me long enough, long enough!" he continued with an oath, lashing himself into a still more furious passion by the violence of his language. "Yes, you have disgraced us both, and covered me with ridicule long enough, and I am now going to put an end to it."

"You are mad," she said, quietly. "But what do you mean? Are you going to challenge Monsieur de Lerne?"

"I am not *going* to challenge him," he replied in the same brutal manner. "I have already done so. We shall fight to-morrow."

The unfortunate woman clasped her hands still more tightly, and an exclamation of despair escaped her. Her husband began to feel some degree of shame for his brutality, and he continued, hastily and almost stammeringly:

"Certainly I had no intention of telling you—that is not my way; but you would have it so. You compelled me to tell you by irritating me beyond endurance, and *he* must needs add the finishing touch this evening. To continue to pay court to the wife, when one is to fight the next morning with the husband, is conduct unworthy of any honorable man. It is infamous, simply infamous!"

"Monsieur de Lerne has never paid court to

me, neither this evening nor at any other time," said Jeanne, vehemently; "at least, not as you understand the expression. Your honor has been compromised only by yourself. Your duel with him would be an act of folly, a sin, a positive crime, for I swear to you, and I affirm it before God and upon the life of my son, he has never been more to me than a friend."

"Oh! certainly," replied Baron de Maurescamp, sneeringly. "Well, I think there has been enough and more than enough of this!" And he started towards the door.

She intercepted him.

"No, do not go yet, I entreat you," she exclaimed; "I beseech you not to go yet. If you but knew what it is to a woman who has suffered, who has struggled, who has been tempted, but who has remained good, pure and faithful, to see herself not only suspected, but condemned and punished with such severity and injustice! If you but knew what is passing in her tortured

heart! If you but knew what you will make of me by refusing to believe my word, and by treating me, who at the very worst have been only imprudent, as if I had been guilty of the most heinous crimes!"

"Oh! enough, enough!" he repeated, rudely, trying to free himself.

But she maintained her hold, pushing him gently backward with a beseeching hand, and he finally retreated to the mantel, against which he leaned in an attitude of sullen resignation.

"You know as well as I the history of our unfortunate married life," she continued. "You did not love me long—it was my fault, undoubtedly. I did not please you. My tastes were not yours: everything that I did, everything that I liked, irritated or bored you. You neglected me; you went back to your pleasures. I felt that I could say nothing since I had not the power to retain your affection; but I was quite young then, for this was some years ago, and I frankly

confess that I was in great peril at the time. Alone in the world, despondent, discouraged, demoralized, without any faithful friend or adviser, surrounded by bad examples, beset by evil counsellors, pursued and tempted by persons whose treachery you did not even suspect—yes,—I was at that moment destitute of feeling and principle, and on the verge of ruin. Ah! well! it was friendship that saved me, this same friendship that you regard as a crime. Monsieur de Lerne has been to me—”

“A brother!” interrupted Baron de Maurescamp in the same tone of insulting irony.

“Yes,” she replied, passionately, “a brother, if you like. This much is certain, it was he who saved me. When I was about to taste forbidden luxuries, he gave me, or rather restored me a relish for those that are permissible; and if your wife is a good woman to-day, it is to him that you are indebted for it. And now you wish to kill him! Is this just, is it honorable?”

"Just or not, I shall do my best to do so, I assure you. Now, let me go."

"But, good God! what kind of a man are you, if you do not believe me, or, if believing me, you still persist in your scheme of hatred and vengeance? No, no, I will not cease to appeal to your reason, to your justice, to your honor. God knows I have no desire to wound you, but in a life like ours, in a situation like mine, what is a young woman to do with her time, her affection and her thoughts? You have your pleasures; allow her, at least, her friends, and rest assured that you must choose between friends whom she acknowledges, and admirers whom she conceals from you."

"Ah! indeed!" exclaimed Baron de Maurescamp. "And what do you desire? What do you ask of me? Do you pretend to say that I should go and offer my hand to Monsieur de Lerne, apologize, and entreat him to kindly resume his relations with you? That would be a little too much!"

“Yes,” she replied, vehemently, “that is what I do ask, and in asking it, I ask of you only an absolutely just, honorable and sensible thing, for it is really the only way in which you can repair the wrong you have done his honor and mine—it is the only means of silencing the calumnies that may even now be in circulation—calumnies to which your conduct this evening will give a semblance of truth, alas!—and of which this duel will be an irrefutable authentication! If you have courage to do justice to your innocent wife, yourself, people will believe you, and, as for me, if you only knew how grateful and thankful I should be, as I would prove by carefully respecting your wishes in the future—wishes of which I have, perhaps, been too unmindful in the past—and who knows but this generous act would form a new bond between us, that our hearts, taught wisdom by sorrow and experience, might not once more be united?—this will depend only upon yourself, I assure you—if you would once more

become what you should always have been, my best, my only friend."

"All this is undoubtedly very fine," said Baron de Maurescamp, sneeringly; "but it is mere nonsense; the same cursed sentimentality that is the ruin of all your sex."

"But, for Heaven's sake, only tell me what you desire," continued the unhappy woman, whose tears were now flowing in torrents. "Only tell me what you would have me do," she continued, wildly, wringing her hands. "Do you wish me to receive Monsieur de Lerne no longer, to see him no more, never to speak to him again, to sacrifice this friendship and all I might have in the future? So be it, I promise it; I pledge myself to do it. I will live alone—I will live as best I can. Besides, my son is growing up—I will devote myself to him; the child shall be my friend. Yes, I feel that it is possible. I swear it, and I will keep my word! But, oh! in pity, in mercy, abandon the idea of this duel. There is

no sense, no reason, no justice in it. It is a most monstrous thing, I assure you. Look! I beseech you, upon my knees!"

She flung herself at his feet in a passion of sobs.

"I entreat you with clasped hands, with my whole heart, with my tears! Be merciful, I entreat you; let me prevail upon you—do not drive me to despair!"

"Bah! this is melodrama now," exclaimed Baron de Maurescamp, repulsing her.

She rose from her knees, dashed away her tears, and, seizing both his hands in a vise-like grasp, she said, in a hollow voice:

"Unfortunate man, you do not know what you are doing, you do not know. I will not say that you are killing me—that would be saying too little—you are sending me straight to perdition."

Then, suddenly releasing his hands, she added:

"You can go. Farewell!"

Baron de Maurescamp left the room.

For some little time after her husband's departure, Jeanne remained seated upon the floor, overwhelmed with despair, her hair partially unbound, and her eyes dry and glassy. She was at last aroused from her stupor by several timid knocks at the door. She instantly rose. The next moment her maid entered, and said :

“Madame, the Countess de Lerne is below and wishes to know if she can see Madame for a moment.”

“The Countess de Lerne?”

“Yes, Madame. Shall I say that Madame is not well? Madame seems to be suffering.”

“Show her up at once.”

Almost immediately the Countess de Lerne entered, livid in her pallor, her eyes haggard, and all her features convulsed and distorted. Without seeming to notice the state of agitation in which she found Jeanne, she walked straight up to her, and, looking her full in the eyes, said :

“Your husband fights to-morrow with my son!”

"I know it," replied Jeanne; "he has just told me."

"Ah! he has just told you," repeated the old lady, bitterly. "It is the act of a scoundrel."

"Yes," said Jeanne, quietly. "But you, how did you hear of it?"

"Through Louis, my son's old servant, who suspected something of the kind, and succeeded in discovering all the arrangements of the seconds."

"You know, Madame, that there is nothing wrong between your son and myself," said Jeanne, quietly.

To tell the truth, this was news to the aged Countess, and, in the agitation of the moment, she could not conceal a sort of naïve surprise.

"But are there any proofs of this?" she asked.

"Proofs of what, since there is nothing?" inquired Jeanne.

"And your husband will not believe you?"

"No."

"Then there is no hope?"

"None."

Madame de Lerne sank into an arm-chair, where she sat silent and motionless.

After a silence, Jeanne, who had been walking nervously to and fro, paused before her.

"Is your son at home?"

"Yes."

"Is your carriage below?" persisted Jeanne. "It is? Then, let us start at once. I am going home with you. I must see him."

As she spoke, she threw a veil over her head and wrapped her furs around her.

Madame de Lerne had risen in evident perplexity.

"Is this prudent?" she asked.

"Can matters be any worse?" responded Jeanne, with a gesture of supreme indifference, and she almost dragged her visitor away. Madame de Lerne lived on the Avenue Montaigne, so the drive was only the affair of a moment. On the way she repeated, in incoherent words, all

she had learned, the pretended cause of the duel, the names of the seconds, the weapons chosen, and the hour and place of meeting.

It was about one o'clock in the morning, and Jacques had completed his final arrangements, when he was startled beyond measure to see the door of his library suddenly open to admit Madame de Maurescamp.

"Good heavens! you!" he exclaimed. "Is it possible!"

"Yes; we have heard all, your mother and I," cried Jeanne, breathlessly, "and I have come. I was determined to come, and here I am!"

"My mother, too!" murmured Jacques. "Ah! how unfortunate! But, my poor, dear friend, why did you come here? This step will be your ruin!"

"I know it," she said, despairingly, sinking into a chair, "but I was determined to see you once more."

She was sobbing piteously.

“My dear lady, my poor child,” he said, gently, taking her hand, “calm yourself, I entreat you, and return home as quickly as possible. Be assured that this duel, which troubles you so much, will be a mere nothing. Between two men who know how to handle a sword and who are about equally matched, a duel is never anything more than a trifling matter.”

“But he hates you so bitterly,” she exclaimed.

Her sobs choked her.

“So it is all ended, ended forever. What injustice. Oh! my God! what injustice!”

“My dear child,” he repeated, “go at once, I beseech you. You would not deprive me of my calmness at such a moment, I am sure. Tell my mother that I entreat her to be reasonable. Tell her there is not the slightest danger, not the slightest, if she will only abstain from disturbing my composure.”

“Farewell, then,” she said, rising, “farewell. We have loved each other well, have we not?”

"Yes, my child, yes."

She gazed at him several seconds without speaking; then, drawing a little closer:

"Yes, yes," she repeated.

Then, lifting her face to his:

"Kiss me on the forehead," she said. "If you die, that will be something."

He just touched her hair with his lips; then, holding her by the arm, he led her out of the room and to the head of the stairs.

"Hasten back to your home," he said, hurriedly, kissing her hands.

Then he left her.

CHAPTER XII.

A DAY OF DOOM.

MADAME DE MAURESCAMP returned home at once, accompanied by Madame de Lerne. Her absence had been very short; the servants saw nothing extraordinary in it, and her imprudent step did not come to the knowledge of her husband.

Overcome by weariness and emotion, she had just fallen asleep about five o'clock in the morning, when a sound above her head awoke her. She heard footsteps hurrying to and fro, and the occasional fall of some article upon the floor, and she knew that her husband and his valet were hastily proceeding with their preparations for departure. A little later, the roll of carriage wheels was heard on the pavement of the courtyard, then under the arched gateway. He was gone.

She rose. Her brain seemed on fire. She opened one of the windows of her chamber which overlooked the garden, and rested her folded arms upon the sill. The sky, the clouds, the walls and the budding leaves all wore a strange and almost fantastic aspect in her eyes, and she heard only vaguely the joyful twitter of a flock of sparrows which were blithely greeting the dawn of a beautiful spring morning.

She suddenly aroused herself from her mournful reverie to go to her son's room and preside, as usual, over the child's morning toilet; and she prolonged this task as much as she could, in order to keep up the illusion of a peaceful and regular state of things as long as possible.

As the morning wore on, her loneliness, in the midst of the anxieties and fears that were torturing her, became intolerable, and she decided to send for her mother. In her generous tenderness she had hesitated to ask her to share this day of anguish, but she felt that her reason was for-

saking her, so she wrote a few lines to Madame de Latour-Mesnil, informing her of what had occurred, and hastily despatched the note.

If Jeanne's mother has ceased to figure in these pages for some time, it is only due to the fact that we have had nothing to say in regard to her that the reader could not easily divine. A single word will suffice in this connection. She was slowly dying of disappointment concerning the grand marriage she had effected for her daughter. Mental trouble had brought on a disease of the liver complicated by grave disorders of the heart. It was in vain that Jeanne had spared her mother not only reproaches but confidences. Madame de Latour-Mesnil was too true a woman and mother, and she had suffered too much herself, not to divine the unfortunate truth, and she could not forgive herself for the strange blindness which had condemned her daughter to a fate far worse than her own. Some mothers console themselves for their daughters' marital unhappiness by the

forbidden happiness they see or imagine they see them enjoying ; but Madame de Latour-Mesnil was not a woman of that stamp, and if anything could aggravate the sorrow and remorse she felt at the irremediable misfortune she had brought upon her daughter, it was the terrible fear that she might, at the same time, have doomed her to shame and disgrace. She had suffered cruel anxiety on this account, and the only happy day she had known for years was one of quite recent date, when her daughter, comprehending her mother's perplexity in regard to her friendly relations with Monsieur de Lerne, had flung her arms about her neck, exclaiming :

“See how I embrace you. I could not embrace you like this if I were a guilty woman. I should not dare !”

Madame de Latour-Mesnil, whose first intimation of Baron de Maurescamp's duel with the Count de Lerne had been received from Jeanne's note, reached her daughter's house about noon.

There were more tears than words between the two ladies at first. But, after the first paroxysm of grief had subsided, Jeanne found a sort of comfort in answering her mother's eager questions, and in telling her all she knew in regard to the particulars of the quarrel, of the incidents at the ball, the scene she had had with her husband on her return home, and even of her clandestine visit to Jacques de Lerne.

While she talked with feverish volubility, sometimes walking, sometimes sitting, she was continually casting hasty and anxious glances at the clock on the mantel. The duel was to take place at three o'clock; she knew this, and, in proportion as the fatal hour approached, she grew more agitated, but less loquacious; her mechanical walk from room to room became more rapid, her face grew flushed, and she could only murmur at intervals phrases that were almost childish in their utter self-abandonment: "Oh! mamma! my poor mamma! What cruelty! What injustice! Oh! my God! what injustice!"

Her mother, alarmed at her excitement, rose and tried to lead her away, saying: "Come to your own room, my child; come and pray!"

"Pray, mother?" she cried, almost rudely. "And for whom do you wish me to pray? For my husband, or for the other? Do you wish me to play the hypocrite?"

"Ah! pray for your poor mother, who has so much need of forgiveness!" exclaimed Madame de Latour-Mesnil, sinking upon her knees, and hiding her face in her hands.

"Mother! mother!" cried Jeanne, lifting her forcibly and pressing her to her heart; "what have I to forgive? Was I not deceived as well as you?"

"Ah! you were excusable, but there was no excuse for me. I was your mother; I was your guide and counsellor. Ah! how greatly I was to blame, how greatly I was to blame for not making a better choice for you! You were so worthy of happiness, my poor darling! You were such an

honest, conscientious woman, and see to what I have brought you!"

"But I am still an honest woman, mother," said Jeanne, in an abstracted tone.

Then, suddenly lifting her forefinger, she pointed to the dial of the clock, and Madame de Latour-Mesnil saw that it marked the hour of three. A strange smile contracted Jeanne's lips. She took her mother's arm and walked slowly to and fro with her without speaking, though from time to time she sighed deeply.

At the end of several moments, she said:

"It is probably over by this time, for, in such affairs, the parties are very punctual, and it does not last long, I have heard. But it is frightful to think that we shall hear nothing for two or three hours. I have done something, mother, which you will not approve, perhaps, but to whom could I apply for news? I could not expect to hear until to-morrow, for Baron de Maurescamp, of course, will not write to me ;

so I asked Louis, Monsieur de Lerne's old servant, who has accompanied his master, to send me a telegram as soon as it was possible for him to do so."

Madame de Latour-Mesnil replied only by a slight movement of the head.

Just at that moment they heard the vestibule bell ring. This bell was connected with the porter's lodge, and, as express orders had been given that the doors of the hôtel should be kept rigorously closed, this announcement of a visitor seemed singular.

"Already!" murmured Jeanne, hastening to a window that overlooked the court-yard. "Already! But it is impossible!"

She drew aside the curtain, and recognized in the person who was ascending the steps a professor of fencing, named Lavarède, who was in the habit of coming three times a week to practise with Baron de Maurescamp. Exceedingly jealous of his reputation as a skilful swordsman,

Baron de Maurescamp, though an assiduous attendant at the fencing-school, was also very fond of practising at home, possibly that he might not reveal the secrets of his method to the public.

The advent of this unexpected visitor, at such a time and under such circumstances, astonished and alarmed both Jeanne and her mother, and they were discussing the subject in anxious whispers when a servant appeared at the door.

"Monsieur Lavarède, the fencing-master, is here, Madame," he said. "He was not aware that the Baron had gone away. He wishes to know if the Baron will be absent long, and if he is to come again day after to-morrow, as usual."

"Tell him I do not know," replied Jeanne. "We will send and inform him."

The servant withdrew, but, after an instant's reflection, Jeanne recalled him.

"Auguste, I wish to speak with Monsieur Lavarède," she said, imperiously. "Show him into the dining-room. I will come down."

Then, turning to Madame de Latour-Mesnil, she said :

“Come with me. I wish to say a few words to this man, and then we will go into the garden. The air will do us good; besides, it is very pleasant this afternoon. Come.”

They went down together arm in arm, and found in the dining-room a man about forty years of age, whose erect bearing proclaimed him a soldier in spite of the civilian's garb he wore. “I desire to speak with you, sir,” said Madame de Maurescamp, hesitatingly. “My husband left for Belgium this morning. You seem to be ignorant of the object of his journey.”

“Yes, Madame, I am ignorant of it.”

“Have not the servants told you?”

“No, Madame.”

“Perhaps, they, themselves, are ignorant of it; it has all happened so quickly. Well, sir, you must mistrust the object of this journey; you certainly perceive the great distress in which

you find my mother and myself. At this very moment, Baron de Maurescamp is fighting a duel."

The visitor replied only by a slight movement of surprise and a grave bow.

"Monsieur," resumed Madame de Maurescamp, whose manner was both brusque and embarrassed, "you must understand our anxiety. Can you say nothing to reassure us?"

"Pardon me, Madame, but may I ask the name of his adversary?"

"His adversary is the Count de Lerne."

"Oh! in that case, Madame, I think you need have no fears," replied the fencing-master with a faint smile.

"No fears? And why?" asked Jeanne, looking intently at the speaker.

"The Count de Lerne, Madame," replied the fencing-master, "is one of the frequenters of our establishment—at least, he used to be—and I know his status perfectly. He fences very well, and at one time he might have been able to compete with Baron de Maurescamp, but since he

was wounded in the arm in his duel with Monsieur de Monthelin, he has lost much of his skill; he tires very quickly, and I have not the slightest doubt that the Baron will easily conquer him. I am sure Madame need have no fears."

"Then you think he will kill Monsieur de Lerne?" Jeanne asked, after a pause.

"Oh! kill him, I hope not, but he will certainly wound or disarm him—the latter, most probably—at least, if the quarrel is not very serious."

"But, sir, you think—you are sure—that I have nothing to fear—for my husband—that he cannot be hurt?" faltered Jeanne.

"I am sure of it, Madame."

"Ah! well! sir, I thank you. I bid you good morning, sir."

She watched him until he had left the room; then, seizing her mother by the arm: .

"Ah! mother," she cried in a choked voice, "I feel that I am becoming a criminal!"

The low French windows of the dining-room

were on a level with the garden. The mother and daughter entered it and seated themselves, side by side, on a bench surrounded by a hedge of already budding lilacs. They had scarcely seated themselves, when Jeanne passionately resumed :

“Mother, if he kills him after what this man has told us, it will be nothing more or less than murder.”

“My dearest child, I entreat you to calm yourself. You grieve me so much, so much ! Besides, what this man has told us is calculated to inspire hope rather than despair, for your husband is not a monster, and there are some things that are impossible between men of honor. If Monsieur de Lerne is really disabled in his right arm—”

“He is,” interrupted Jeanne; “I have observed it more than once.”

“Then your husband will certainly notice it,” continued Madame de Latour-Mesnil, “and he will be content with disarming him.”

“Ah ! mother, he hates him so intensely ! And then he is not kind at heart ; he is vindictive.”

Nevertheless, she clung to the hope that her mother had suggested. Yes, it did, indeed, seem reasonable. After all, Baron de Maurescamp was a man of honor in the general acceptance of the term. He would not be likely to take an unfair advantage of an inequality of strength, and, besides, during the journey he would certainly recollect what his wife had said to him the evening before; he would have time to reflect more coolly; he could not but be almost certain of her innocence, and be half-appeased and less hungry for vengeance.

Nor was the soothing and beneficent influence that emanated from everything around her, without its effect; she felt it in the quiet of the large garden with its high, cloister-like walls, in the pure air, the blue sky, the scent of the budding verdure and the beauty of the declining day. The imagination finds it difficult to associate scenes of blood and violence with the charming and unalterable serenity of nature, and it seems to those who are surrounded by the tranquillity

of the country or a garden that peace must be reigning everywhere, even as it is reigning around them.

So, as the hours went by, bringing no new emotion, their former excitement gradually subsided, and, as Jeanne and her mother sat there silently, hand in hand, both experienced an almost pleasant feeling of torpor after the intense agitation of the day.

It was a little past five o'clock, when Jeanne suddenly sprang up. She had heard the bell again resound in the hall.

"It has come this time!" she exclaimed.

Two minutes passed. Jeanne and her mother remained motionless, with eyes riveted upon the hall door. A servant appeared upon the threshold, waiter in hand.

"A telegram for Madame."

"Give it to me," said Jeanne, advancing a few steps towards him.

She waited until the servant had retired;

then, without opening the despatch, she turned and looked at her mother.

"Let me open it," murmured Madame de Latour-Mesnil, trying to take the telegram.

"No," her daughter replied, smiling. "I shall have courage!"

She tore open the envelope. But her glance had scarcely fallen on the despatch when it slipped from her hands. Her eyes became fixed, her lips quivered convulsively, and, throwing up her clasped hands with a prolonged shriek that resounded throughout the entire house, she fell upon the gravel at her mother's feet, cold and rigid. As the servants rushed out in response to this despairing cry, Madame de Latour-Mesnil, frantic with grief, bent over her daughter, and, while lavishing every care upon her, anxiously seized the telegram. This is what she read:

"SOIGNIES, 3.30 P. M.

"Monsieur Jacques, mortally wounded, has just breathed his last.

"LOUIS."

CHAPTER XIII.

A STRANGE TRANSFORMATION.

ABOUT six months later, in the middle of October of the same year, we find Baron and Madame de Maurescamp installed at *La Vénerie*, a magnificent estate, situated midway between Greil and Compiègne, and which Baron de Maurescamp had purchased about eighteen months previous. He was extremely fond of hunting, and the fact that the sport at *La Vénerie* was uncommonly fine had induced him to purchase the estate, so he would no longer be obliged to rent a different hunting lodge each year. He had invited a large number of guests for the opening of the season, among others Messieurs de Monthelin, d'Hermany, de la Jardye and Saville, towards whom Madame de Maurescamp performed her duties as hostess

with much good tact, grace and even gayety. It was generally thought that this gayety was rather unseemly, and that, after having been the conscious or unconscious cause of a man's death so short a time before, she ought to feel, or, at least, pretend to feel, a certain melancholy. But a woman's heart is an impenetrable mystery.

After the duel which had ended so fatally to the Count de Lerne, no argument or entreaty could induce Jeanne de Maurescamp to remain under her husband's roof and await his return; and she had taken refuge in her mother's house that same evening, carrying her son with her. The delicate task of arranging with Baron de Maurescamp the conditions of a mode of life suitable under the circumstances devolved upon Madame de Latour-Mesnil, who found her son-in-law less difficult to deal with than she had expected. He was not sorry to be freed from the necessity of immediate personal contact with his wife, feeling that he had, perhaps, gone rather

too far, on the strength of mere suspicions, in the case of Monsieur de Lerne. The fact that one has killed a man is not a pleasant thought to any person, and, though Baron de Maurescamp was not prone to sentiment, he experienced a sort of vague remorse, which revealed itself in the conciliatory manner he displayed towards his mother-in-law. So it was agreed that Madame de Maurescamp should keep her son, and that she should accompany her mother first to Vichy, and then to Vevey, in Switzerland, where they would spend the summer. During this interval, the mutual resentment of the husband and wife would be softened and appeased all the more certainly, since, according to Madame de Latour-Mesnil, the whole unfortunate affair had been only a series of misunderstandings.

The duel had kept Paris in a state of excitement for a week, but the final result was a verdict favorable to Madame de Maurescamp. There had been such a great disparity between the

cruelty of the dénouement and the very slight imprudence of conduct with which one could reproach Jeanne and Monsieur de Lerne that a very general sympathy was awakened, and calumny was disarmed. It was the almost unanimous opinion that Baron de Maurescamp had displayed a most unwarranted ferocity and implacability against a man whose only crime had really been reading with his wife, and these rumors, by appeasing Baron de Maurescamp's vanity and flattering his pride, did not a little to facilitate the reunion of the estranged couple.

At first, Madame de Maurescamp had absolutely refused to entertain the idea of any such arrangement for a moment, but, after two or three months had passed in a sort of despairing stupor, she seemed to suddenly awake one day, and, after some reflections which she confided to no one, she informed her mother that she would follow her advice and return to her husband; she asked only a few months' delay.

“He must have time to dry his hands,” she remarked, not without bitterness.

After this decision was made, her mood changed wonderfully ; she seemed to acquire a new taste for life, and her interest in the future became sufficiently lively to restore much of her old-time activity and animation.

She had, consequently, rejoined her husband in Paris late in the month of September, and had resumed her home life as quietly as if she had just returned from an ordinary journey. To tell the truth, Baron de Maurescamp appeared the more embarrassed of the two. As they had never been in the habit of displaying much affection for each other, there was no perceptible change in their relations now. She just touched, with a faint smile, the hand he offered ; and the health of their son Robert, his improved appearance and rapid growth furnished them with topics of conversation that soon set them at ease. A few days later, they took up their abode at *La Vénèrie*,

where the presence of their guests spared them the constraint of a prolonged tête-à-tête.

As one may very readily suppose, Madame de Maurescamp was, at first, an object of great curiosity to the guests at the château, and to her country neighbors. It was impossible not to watch with eager attention the countenance and demeanor of a lady, whose name had been so recently involved in a tragical affair that was still shrouded in so much mystery. But the efforts of the curious went unrewarded. Jeanne's manner was perfectly natural and composed, and, unless one were to suppose her endowed with great powers of dissimulation—which it is generally safe, it is true, to ascribe to her sex—one was compelled to believe that she had quite forgotten the griefs and annoyances that had so recently beset her. It even appeared, as we have previously remarked, that she scarcely manifested a sufficient amount of regret for a man who had died for her, and who had, at least, been her friend.

"It is really discouraging," "the handsome Saville" exclaimed to Madame d'Hermany one day. "If poor de Lerne could return to the world for a few moments, he would be confoundedly surprised."

"But why, my friend?"

"Because it is actually revolting, upon my word!" replied Saville, who, though not by any means a genius, had really a kind heart. "One would suppose that the poor fellow's death had been a positive relief to her! Never have I seen her in such exuberant spirits. Catch me getting myself killed for any woman!"

"No one thinks of killing you, my dear. Have no fears; and as to my friend Jeanne, she is a difficult person to read. I do not know what is going on in her pretty head, but there is something in her eyes that would not please me much if I were her husband."

"I have not noticed anything of the kind," returned Saville.

“You! of course not!” was the rejoinder.

His wife’s gayety, though it shocked every one around him, was by no means displeasing to Baron de Maurescamp; on the contrary, it seemed to afford him infinite satisfaction. “She is a different woman!” he exclaimed, “an entirely different woman! She is thoroughly trained now. All women need training, that is my theory. Since my wife received her lesson, a rather severe one, it is true, she has come to her senses, and is a hundred times more contented and agreeable than before. The system is perfect, perfect!”

A change which was exceedingly strange and well worthy of interest had, indeed, taken place in Jeanne’s tastes and habits. Instead of devoting herself as formerly to pursuits of an intellectual character, she seemed to have suddenly acquired a taste for entirely different pleasures. She never opened a book; her piano remained closed; her diary was no longer made the recipient of her

secret thoughts or of extracts from her favorite poets; she had lost that proneness to emotion and enthusiasm which had formerly distinguished her, and she had contracted that vulgar and detestable Parisian habit of perpetual levity. She followed the hounds through the forests of Compiègne, hunted on foot in the woods of *La Vénérrie*, and showed herself a no less untiring waltzer every evening. Gentlemen had never found her so attractive; and we are forced to add that they had never before suspected her of being so coquettish, for she had become so, and even in this pleasing art she displayed the inordinate zeal of a *débutante* who has not yet gained a correct idea of just how far she can go with propriety. As a natural consequence, her manner and language sometimes overstepped the bounds that separate the upper from the lower classes. But this did not displease Baron de Maurescamp; it amused him, and he laughed about it in company with his friends.

"She is beginning a new existence," he said, "and her manner is slightly exaggerated. Indeed, she is much like the newly married people who talk all sorts of nonsense the day after their wedding; but it will pass off."

But for all that, he finally came to the conclusion that his wife did display rather too marked a predilection for gentlemen's society. They were her chosen companions in her walks and hunting excursions, and also in the billiard-room; but it surprised him a little to see her follow them into the saddle-room, where they assembled almost every morning to practise fencing. It was a spacious room, paved in mosaic, comfortably warmed, cheerfully lighted, and admirably adapted to this kind of sport. High benches of wicker work lined the sides of the room, and served as seats for the lookers on. The first time that Baron de Maurescamp and his guests suddenly discovered, through the dense clouds of tobacco smoke that filled the apartment, Jeanne

de Maurescamp seated upon one of these benches, they experienced a feeling not only of surprise but of positive annoyance. She had entered noiselessly, and, after seating herself in silence, she began to watch those who were fencing with the closest attention. It seemed to every one exceedingly strange that a person, who was generally considered susceptible and sensitive, should come to witness a scene that could not fail to awaken extremely unpleasant memories. It was necessary to accustom themselves to her presence, however, for, from that day she never failed to visit the saddle-room at the hour Baron de Maurescamp was accustomed to repair there with his guests. This singular young woman seemed to watch their every movement with impassioned interest. Leaning slightly forward, her face grave and her eyes fixed, she seemed entirely absorbed in contemplating each thrust and counter thrust exchanged between the adversaries; but it was when her husband engaged in the

contest that her curiosity and interest seemed to attain their highest degree of intensity. Under such circumstances, she became so absorbed that her very breathing appeared to be suspended, and her close attention seemed to annoy even Baron de Maurescamp.

By dint of this close application, Jeanne soon gained considerable knowledge of the art of fencing and learned to form a tolerably correct estimate of the relative skill of the different swordsmen. In this way, she was soon able to satisfy herself that her husband was, indeed, as she had heard, a skilful swordsman of unusual strength and endurance, and that there was only one of his guests who was at all able to compete with him. This was Monsieur de Monthelin. On two or three occasions he had even worsted his host, which fact had won him several gracious words from Madame de Maurescamp.

CHAPTER XIV.

SCHEMES OF VENGEANCE.

IT is scarcely necessary to say that Monsieur de Monthelin, on finding himself freed from the rivalry of the Count de Lerne, had cautiously resumed his former rôle of suitor and consoler. Up to this time he had considered himself seriously encouraged, and he was beginning to cherish very sanguine hopes of ultimate success when an unexpected event suddenly brought all his plans to grief.

In addition to his city guests and his neighbors, Baron de Maurescamp occasionally invited officers from the garrison at Compiègne, whom he had known in Paris or met in the course of his hunting expeditions, to hunt with him at *La Vénèrie*. These officers were, for the most part, thorough men of the world and unexceptionable

in manners, but there was one who was a notable exception, and whose presence at *La Vénérerie* occasioned considerable surprise. This was a young captain of chasseurs, named de Sontis, well born, but extremely ill-bred. Nor did his personal appearance at all atone for what he lacked in social and moral distinction. He was small of stature, slender and pale, with thin, light hair, gray eyes, and a hard and cynical expression; but he was an accomplished sportsman, and not only thoroughly conversant with all matters connected with riding, horse-racing and hunting, but an executant of superior skill. It was by means of these qualities that he had made a conquest of Baron de Maurescamp, who had recently taken it into his head to make up a stable of racers, and who was constantly conferring with Captain de Sontis on this important subject, and spoke very highly of his valuable advice.

Madame de Maurescamp, on the contrary, had taken a strong dislike to the young man at first

sight, and made no effort to conceal her antipathy. Hence it was with no little annoyance that she saw him establish himself at *La Vénérerie* early in November for a stay of three weeks, at the invitation of Baron de Maurescamp, for until then he had only breakfasted or dined at the château on the occasion of some hunting party.

The first morning he spent at the château, Captain de Sontis was courteously invited to accompany Baron de Maurescamp and two or three guests to the fencing-hall to practise a little if he felt inclined. Captain de Sontis replied that he would be delighted to rub the rust off a little; it had been such a long time since he had handled a foil. After sparring against the wall for some moments, he accepted a challenge to a slight bout from the master of the house. They began, and Baron de Maurescamp was greatly astonished to find a formidable opponent in this extremely insignificant person. This small and apparently delicate young man had the keen eye,

wonderful suppleness and cunning of a tiger. Though a little surprised at first by the unusual vigor of Baron de Maurescamp's blows, he speedily recovered himself and at last gained a decisive advantage. Baron de Maurescamp, considerably piqued, laughingly remarked that he hoped to have his revenge the next day.

"Very well," responded Captain de Sontis; "I am entirely at your service, but I warn you that I have you in my power now, and that you can touch me only when I choose."

"We will see," said Baron de Maurescamp, dryly.

Jeanne had been present that morning, as usual, and she left the room with an air of thoughtful gravity she had not worn since she entered upon her new life. She seemed preoccupied all day.

She did not fail to visit the fencing-hall the following morning.

Baron de Maurescamp and Captain de Sontis began a combat to which the little episode of the preceding day lent an unusual interest. The

curiosity of all the spectators was evidently aroused, but that of Madame de Maurescamp was excited to an intense degree, and her contracted features, while she followed all the different phases of the struggle, indicated an interest, or, rather, an anxiety, quite disproportionate to the circumstances.

This passage-at-arms ended disastrously for the Baron. The young officer of chasseurs, though by no means his host's equal in physical strength, had muscles of steel in spite of his rather frail appearance. He was a thorough master of the art of fencing, and he had quickly discerned the peculiarities and faults of Baron de Maurescamp's really admirable method. He had noticed, too, that his opponent made the usual mistake of very powerful and sanguine men, that is, to say, he was inclined to depend too much upon strength, and to unconsciously despise the aid of skill. Himself endowed with incomparable suppleness and precision of movement, and with an eye as

steady as his hand, Captain de Sontis was more than a match for his adversary. He harassed and confused him by pretended passes, and, whenever his opponent was off guard for an instant, as often happens with violent swordsmen, he always took advantage of the opportunity to drive his foil home with marvellous rapidity. Baron de Maurescamp seemed to have an invisible and intangible sword constantly before him, which he felt only when it touched his breast. In short, he received five or six blows of the button during the contest, but did not succeed in giving a single one.

Baron de Maurescamp's extremely sensitive self-love would not allow him to acknowledge his decided inferiority. He merely remarked that he was not quite in the mood for fencing that day, but, though the contest was renewed several times during the ensuing week, he succeeded no better, and, though he did manage two or three times in as many successive struggles to touch Captain de

Sontis with the end of his foil, it was evident to every one that the Captain permitted it merely through politeness. From that time forth, Baron de Maurescamp, angry and humiliated, always found some pretext for abstaining from the exercise.

Women love the valiant and successful. It was, doubtless, on account of this noble trait, so noticeable in her sex, that Madame de Maurescamp seemed to suddenly forgive the young officer for his unprepossessing appearance and bad reputation, and began to show special favor to the man she had formerly treated with a scornful indifference bordering upon aversion. Captain de Sontis was so little accustomed to such good fortune that he scarcely understood the nature of the attentions with which he was honored. He responded to them at first with great reserve; perhaps as his experience had been limited to the decidedly commonplace and vulgar love affairs of garrison life, he felt rather ill at ease in the presence of an elegant and

refined woman like Jeanne de Maurescamp ; perhaps—for he was exceedingly shrewd—he suspected that some snare was concealed beneath the favor of which he, possibly, had the good sense to realize his unworthiness.

Strange as it may seem, there appeared to be no possible doubt that this beautiful, refined and chaste woman had become infatuated with this undeniably vulgar man. During the last week of his sojourn at *La Vénèrie*, the signs of Jeanne's mad passion betrayed themselves more and more unmistakably to the curious or jealous eyes that were watching.

Not a little astonishment was felt that such a marked infatuation should escape the notice of the person most interested, that is to say Baron de Maurescamp, who had previously given proofs of such keen susceptibility in such matters ; and even more amazement was excited by Madame de Maurescamp's want of ordinary prudence. She often favored her husband with the spectacle

of her whispered asides with Captain de Sontis; she awkwardly chose the very moment when the Baron was crossing the court-yard to throw one of the flowers from her *bouquet de corsage* to the young officer; she invited him to act as her escort on her rides, in which expeditions they sometimes lost their way in the woods and returned only at nightfall, just as Baron de Maurescamp was beginning to grow impatient, if not anxious. Finally, she waltzed the entire evening with the Captain, talking to him with her face close to his and with smiles and glances that could scarcely fail to set his blood on fire.

In spite of the reserve and distrust Captain de Sontis had shown in the beginning, it was impossible for him to resist such allurements long. Perhaps, he had also received sufficient proofs of Jeanne's preference to dispel his former apprehensions. However this may have been, he soon began to share the violent passion he appeared to have inspired, and he even displayed

in this love affair, which was so novel to him, a kind of grim ferocity that seemed to afford Madame de Maurescamp considerable amusement.

Baron de Maurescamp continued oblivious, at least, apparently. Still, from some cause or other, he seemed preoccupied, and was less pompous, noisy and arrogant than usual. He had become almost melancholy, and livid spots were sometimes visible on his ruddy face. A keen observer would also have been struck with the undisguisedly ironical glances his wife bestowed upon him, and under which he was evidently far from comfortable.

The 28th of November was the last day Captain de Sontis was to spend at the château. There was no hunt that day, and Baron de Maurescamp went out immediately after breakfast to superintend some repairs that were to be made to the house of the keeper. In returning to the château, he was in the habit of forsaking the main avenue that led through the park and

taking a footpath known as "Diana's walk," which shortened the way considerably. This path traversed a dense thicket, which had been a portion of the old park and which was to be transformed into an orchard; but, in the meantime, it remained in a neglected state and formed a sort of small and lonely sacred grove. The walk owed its name to an old statue of Diana, of which the body alone remained, the head of the goddess having fallen off and rolled down among the weeds. Such a lonely and retired spot was an admirable place for a lovers' rendezvous, but it, nevertheless, showed a great want of foresight on the part of Jeanne de Maurescamp to select it that morning as the scene of her tender parting with the officer of the chasseurs. She was not ignorant of her husband's morning excursion to the keeper's cottage; she also knew what path he would take in returning, hence how could she have been so blinded by passion as to forget that he would

probably pass through that walk at the very hour she had appointed for her meeting with Captain de Sontis?

In any case, they were both there, deeply absorbed in conversation and seated side by side on an old rustic bench embowered in verdure, and directly in front of the broken statue. The hour of departure being so near, the officer seemed more eager even than usual, Jeanne more wavering, and they were talking together in low tones, holding each other by the hand, with their faces almost touching, when Captain de Sontis detected in Madame de Maurescamp's eyes a sudden flash that was evidently not intended for him. Turning hastily, he glanced in the same direction in which she was looking and saw, somewhat indistinctly through the trees at the end of the walk, the figure of a man who seemed undecided as to whether or not to advance, but who finally turned his back upon them, took another path, and dis-

appeared in the shrubbery. Captain de Sontis thought he recognized Baron de Maurescamp.

"Is not that your husband?" he said to Jeanne.

"Yes."

"Do you think he saw us?"

"I cannot say," was the reply; "but, if he did see us, he is a coward."

Whether he had seen them or not, Baron de Maurescamp quietly returned to the château by the longer but more comfortable path through the new park; but he went out again almost immediately, and spent the remainder of the day in inspecting his plantations and directing his wood-cutters, returning barely in time for dinner.

It was, perhaps, merely the result of fancy that Captain de Sontis, on descending to the drawing-room, thought he detected a slight constraint in the greeting of his host and a certain alteration in his features. Dinner was served. There were about twenty guests at the table, and they were slightly scandalized to see that Madame de Maurescamp had given the seat of honor at her right

to the Captain of chasseurs, who was one of the youngest and most insignificant of her guests; but he was to leave the next morning, and this circumstance might explain, to a certain extent, the extraordinary honor done him.

Either this little breach of etiquette offended a number of the guests, or there was in the air that vague uneasiness which is the precursor of an approaching storm, for the beginning of the meal was silent and constrained; but the abundance and excellence of the wines which constituted a part of a most delicious repast soon dispelled the gloom, brightened the countenances that had been a trifle *distrain* at first, and sharpened the wits of the party; and the conversation became even more animated and brilliant than usual, as not unfrequently happens when it has been necessary to make a decided effort to overcome a slight coldness and embarrassment at first. In short, this dinner which had begun in rather a funereal fashion terminated as should a brilliant repast of huntsmen and men of the world, who--

desire to be agreeable was greatly stimulated by the presence of several pretty women. Baron de Maurescamp, himself, who usually drank very sparingly, drained his glass that evening more frequently than was altogether prudent, and seemed to be relieved of the burden that had been weighing upon his mind for some time past. Perhaps, he was secretly rejoicing at the approaching departure of an unwelcome guest. At all events, he had suddenly resumed his complacent and authoritative manner, and he even went so far as to communicate some of his favorite principles and theories to his guests, in his former unctuous and triumphant tones.

Madame de Maurescamp lavished upon Captain de Sontis favors and attentions which evidently embarrassed him in spite of his assurance, while, at the same time, as if in imitation of her husband, she amused herself by drinking bumpers of Sauterne and Champagne which seemed to occasion paroxysms of almost hysterical gayety. Between her fits of rather boister-

ous hilarity, she relapsed into sullen reveries not unlike those of a weary Bacchante.

At dessert, she declared that coffee should be served in the dining-room: they were all in such an exceedingly happy mood, and if they separated, some to go to the smoking-room, the others to the parlor, the charm would be broken, so they would remain together, and the gentlemen should be allowed to smoke. This announcement was greeted with great applause.

Coffee was served; then cigars were passed around. Jeanne declared that she intended to try to smoke, and she took a cigar from the tray.

"You will make yourself ill," exclaimed Baron de Maurescamp; "at least, make the attempt with a cigarette."

"No, no; I want a cigar!" replied his wife, whose eyes seemed rather unnatural in their expression.

Baron de Maurescamp shrugged his shoulders, and said no more.

Jeanne struck a match, lighted her cigar and began to smoke resolutely amid the plaudits of the guests, but, at the end of two or three minutes, she exclaimed :

“You were right. It does make me ill.”

Then, turning suddenly to her neighbor on the right :

“Captain,” she said, taking the still humid cigar from her lips and offering it to him, “here, finish my cigar !”

On seeing this action and hearing these few simple words, the twenty guests, so noisy and excited an instant before, seemed to have been suddenly changed to marble, and such a death-like silence filled the room that one could hear the murmur of the wintry wind without as distinctly as if the apartment had been empty.

All the eyes, which had at first fixed themselves on Jeanne, turned towards her husband who was seated opposite her. Though extremely pale, he was quietly watching Captain de Sontis and waiting.

The officer hesitated. He looked Jeanne searchingly in the eyes.

"Ah! well!" she said, almost sneeringly. "What are you afraid of?"

He hesitated no longer, but took the proffered cigar and placed it between his teeth.

At the same instant, Baron de Maurescamp drew his own cigar from his mouth and dashed it violently in the officer's face.

"Finish mine, also, Captain!" he cried.

The half-consumed cigar struck Captain de Sontis full in the face, emitting a shower of sparks.

Every one started up, and, in the midst of the general confusion and stupor, Jeanne suddenly rose to her feet and stood proudly erect, cold and unmoved, with one hand resting on the back of her chair, and upon her beautiful face, once so pure and noble, that expression of mingled horror and ferocious joy which one might have seen on the charming visage of Marie Stuart when she heard the explosion which avenged the murder of Rizzio.

CHAPTER XV.

“LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI.”

IMMEDIATELY after this scene, which seemed likely to be followed by tragical consequences, the majority of the guests discreetly disappeared. Those residing in the neighborhood ordered their carriages at once; others took the evening train for Paris, and there remained at the château only the most intimate friends of the Baron and Baroness.

Captain de Sontis was, naturally, the first to depart. He took up his quarters for the night at an inn in the nearest village, and, a duel being inevitable, two officers of his regiment, who had also been present at the dinner, entered into negotiations with Messieurs d'Hermany and de la Jardye, whom Baron de Maurescamp had again requested to serve as his seconds.

We will not weary the reader a second time with a detailed account of the conference that took place between these gentlemen. It was understood, from the very first, that there was to be no attempt at a reconciliation. As to the choice of weapons, it was very evident (after what had occurred in his contests with Captain de Sontis), that Baron de Maurescamp would prefer pistols; but, though the act of extreme ill-breeding which the Captain had committed, at the instigation of Madame de Maurescamp, had at first placed the husband in the position of the offended party, he had lost that advantage by allowing himself to become enraged to such an extent as to respond to this act by a deadly insult. Besides, Baron de Maurescamp's pride, which was thoroughly aroused, made him accept the sword without controversy this time, whatever his secret preference might have been.

It was decided that the meeting should take place the following morning, at ten o'clock, in a

clearing of the forest adjoining *La Vénérîe*, for it was not thought seemly that the duel should be fought on Baron de Maurescamp's property.

There was not much sleeping done at the château that night. The guests held animated conversations in their private apartments; items of news were carried from chamber to chamber; the gentlemen discussed questions relating to points of honor, and the nervous and excited ladies talked in eager whispers, wiping away a few tears, and, in their secret hearts, enjoying the whole affair immensely. It is needless to say that the entire retinue of servants, from the cooks to the stable boys, was agitated by the same emotions; that is to say they were all a prey to that delightful uneasiness and agreeable excitement which the peril of others generally inspires.

It is quite probable that the master and mistress of the house slept no more than their guests. Baron de Maurescamp, realizing that the affair was of the gravest possible nature,

busied himself in putting his business in order. Jeanne refused to see any one; the guests had only been able to learn, through the report of her maid, that she had spent the entire night in pacing her room, raving and ranting *like an actress*.

The gloomy dawn of a November day was scarcely an hour old when Baron de Maurescamp, whose apartments were on the first floor, stepped out-of-doors the following morning to smoke a cigar in the court-yard. He walked on until he reached the entrance gate, and there found himself face to face with a young peasant lad, thirteen or fourteen years of age, who paused abruptly on perceiving him, and in whom the Baron thought he recognized a stable boy employed at the village inn. The lad's manner was so confused and embarrassed that Baron de Maurescamp, in spite of the anxieties of the moment, was struck by it.

"What is your business? Where are you going?" inquired the Baron.

"To the château," stammered the youth, blushing furiously, at the same time keeping one of his hands awkwardly hidden under his blouse.

"What are you going to the château for?" insisted Baron de Maurescamp.

"To speak to Mlle. Julie."

Julie was Madame de Maurescamp's maid.

"Who sent you, my boy?"

"A gentleman," murmured the lad, more and more timidly.

"A gentleman who is stopping at the inn, eh?"

"Yes."

"An officer?"

"Yes."

"What are you concealing under your blouse? A letter? Give it to me. Come, give it to me."

The lad, almost ready to cry, was finally induced, partly by persuasion and partly by force, to surrender a sealed envelope which he was crumpling in his clenched hand.

The envelope bore no address.

"For whom is this letter intended, my boy?"

"For Madame," replied the youth.

"Then you were told to give it to Mlle. Julie, so she would deliver it to Madame?"

The youth made a sign in the affirmative.

"Ah! well, my boy," said Baron de Maurescamp, "I will execute your commission for you. Come with me to wait for an answer, if there should be one."

The Baron, accompanied by the young peasant, rapidly retraced his steps, and, leaving the lad in the hall, entered his own apartments. There, he hastily tore open the envelope containing the letter intended for his wife, and read these words, which were not signed, but in regard to the authorship of which there could be no possible doubt:

"Have no fears. For your sake I will spare him."

Baron de Maurescamp's first impulse was to

tear this insolent note into fragments and cast them into the fire, but a sudden thought deterred him. He took a fresh envelope from his desk, slipped the note into it and sealed it. He had been suddenly seized with a strange curiosity; he wished to know if his wife would reply to this message, and *what* she would reply.

He went back to the young peasant he had left in the hall.

“My boy,” he said to him, returning the letter, “I was unable to find Mlle. Julie. She must be in the kitchen. Go and ring at the little door opposite, and ask for her. Wait, here is a hundred sous piece for your trouble.”

The lad thanked him and proceeded to the door indicated. Baron de Maurescamp again went down to the gate, left the court-yard and walked slowly along the road leading to the village.

Singular was it not?—in an hour he was going to risk his life with every chance against him, and yet this thought, serious as it was, was at that

moment forgotten, effaced from his mind by the single query: "What will my wife say in reply?"

The truth was that this man, in spite of his superb physique, had not maintained a very successful resistance to the anxieties that had been torturing him for several weeks. His nervous system, in fact, had almost given way under the astonishment and dread inspired by this enduring hatred, this wily, premeditated and implacable vengeance of which he felt he was soon to become the victim. Accustomed to treat women as children or playthings, he was amazed and even terrified to encounter in one of these frivolous and despised creatures a clearness of discernment and a strength of will over which all his personal attributes and attractions—physical vigor, fortune, social position and marital authority—not only exerted no influence whatever, but were regarded as nought.

Perhaps, at that moment of profound distress, he would have paid dearly for a word of kindness,

interest or even pity from the woman he had formerly treated with such disdain. Perhaps, he hoped for this word in the response for which he was waiting.

At the end of about ten minutes, the lad was seen leaving the château. Entirely reassured by the result of his first interview with Baron de Maurescamp, he did not even take the trouble this time to conceal the note of which he was the bearer. He passed him with a smile and a bow.

“Ah! you have an answer!” exclaimed Baron de Maurescamp, stopping him; “I know what it is about, and I shall, perhaps, have something to add to it.” At the same time he slipped another coin into the lad’s hand.

He took the letter. The envelope was a fresh one and still damp. He was not even obliged to tear it in order to open it. He found in the envelope the Captain’s note, which Madame de Maurescamp had returned after writing her response upon it.

Below this line in the Captain's handwriting :

"Have no fears. For your sake I will spare him,"

Madame de Maurescamp had simply added :

"Pray do not take the trouble."

Baron de Maurescamp, after reading it, replaced the note in the envelope and returned it to the boy, who hastened on.

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CHAPTER XVI.

ANOTHER TRANSFORMATION.

THE duel took place about an hour and a half afterwards, and Baron de Maurescamp was dangerously wounded in the breast.

For some time it was thought that he could not survive, as his lungs had sustained serious injuries, but his powerful constitution finally saved him. Nevertheless, his health still remains in a precarious state, and it does not seem probable that his nervous system will ever recover from its present shattered condition.

It seems to be the general impression with all such as are charitably inclined, that, in this affair with Captain de Sontis, his wife had really been guilty of nothing worse than drinking a little too much Sauterne, and smoking a cigar which had deprived her of such slight consciousness of her

acts as remained; consequently, he can continue to live with her on amicable terms, and he even accords her a kind of resigned and submissive deference, quite astonishing on the part of one who was formerly so arrogant and conceited.

It is true that he has succeeded in effecting a complete transformation in his wife's nature, and that he ought to be satisfied with his work, for Jeanne is no longer romantic, and she no longer reads Tennyson. Since the unnatural death of her companion in intellectual pursuits, ideality itself seems to have died within her. After having at first affected, merely from a spirit of ironical revenge, the habits and manners of a woman hungry for amusement, excitement and worldly pleasures, she has become fond of her rôle, and now plays it to the life.

Cold, satirical, thoroughly worldly, boldly coquettish and indifferent to everything, since the death of her mother, the one elevated sentiment she retains is that which takes her three

times a week to the bedside of an aged paralytic who has relapsed into utter childishness—the Countess de Lerne.

We have nothing more to say concerning Jeanne Bérengère de Latour-Mesnil, Baroness de Maurescamp. We, together probably with the reader, ceased to feel any interest in her, when her heartless and atrocious reply to Captain de Sontis' note proved that the angel had, unquestionably, become a fiend.

The moral of this only too true story is that monsters are not born: God does not make any, but men make many; and this is a fact which mothers ought never to forget.

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THE END.

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